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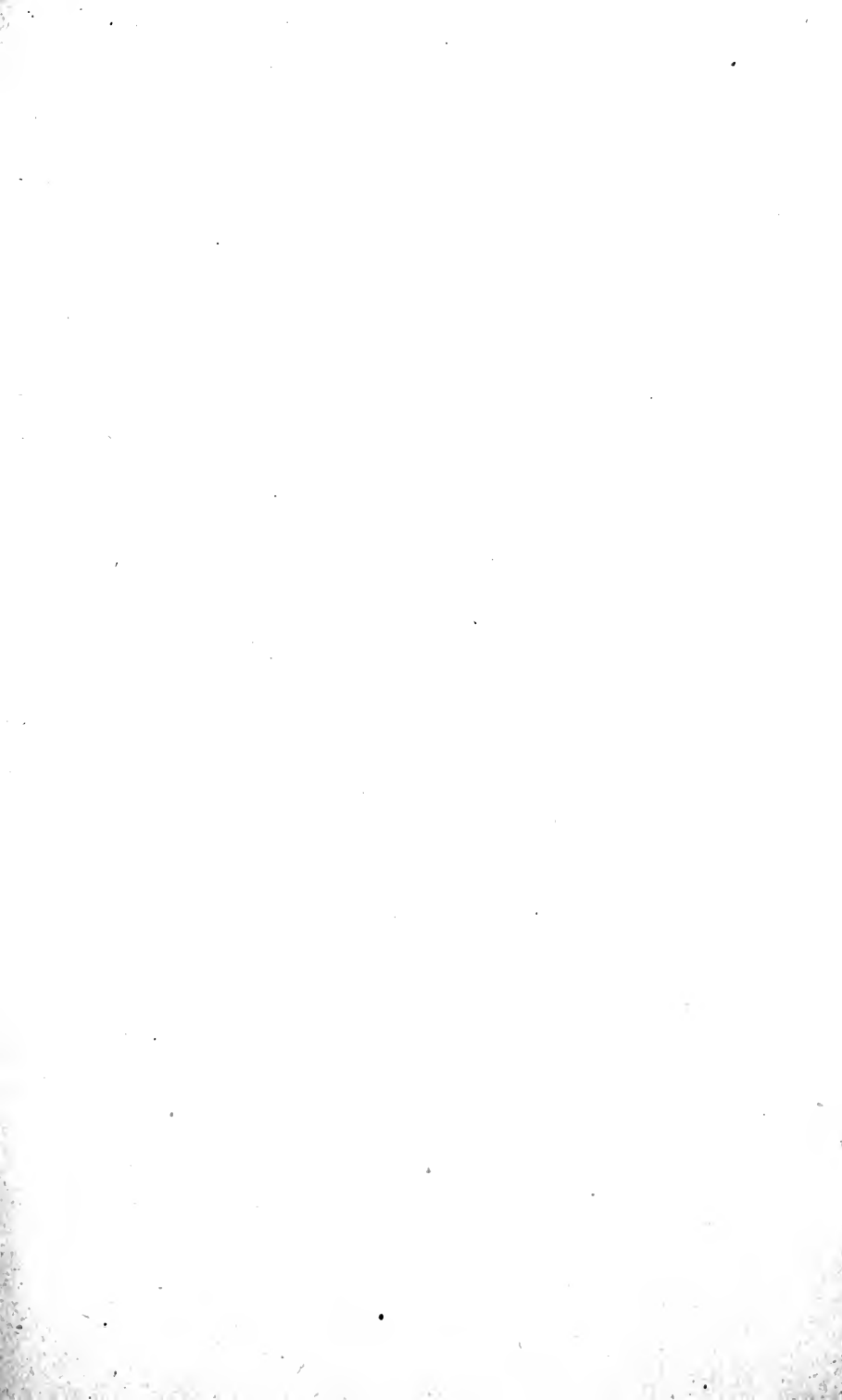
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THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.

BY

JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.,

Minister of the City Temple, Holborn Viaduct, London.

AUTHOR OF "ECCE DEUS," "THE PARACLETE," "THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST,"
"SPRINGDALE ABBEY," "THE INNER LIFE OF CHRIST," "AD CLERUM,"
"THE ARK OF GOD," "APOSTOLIC LIFE," "TYNE CHYLDE," ETC.

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“The Bible is the flaming book which men fear will be destroyed ; but sooner will you pluck the stars out of heaven, than one star out of this divine book. . . . All theories respecting the history and structure of the Bible may be mooted and disputed ; but there it is, a book whose fruits rise higher, smell sweeter, taste more flavoursome, inspire more health, than any or all others that have been produced upon the plane of human life.”—HENRY WARD BEECHER.

THE THIRD BOOK OF MOSES.

CONSIDERED as embracing the history of one month only, this may claim to be the most remarkable book in the Old Testament. Containing twenty-seven chapters; ranging its contents under sixteen different categories; and requiring to be actively represented within the space of say eight-and-twenty days, it may, in its own degree, claim an energy not inferior to the book of Genesis. The same fearlessness of treatment is distinctive of both books. The reverent audacity which represented creation as the work of six days—whatever the measure of a day may be—did not shrink from focalising into one month the whole discipline of life. Moses loses nothing by diffuseness. Even in days that were made long by intolerable monotony—in which men lived centuries because of weariness—Moses did not shrink from a condensation unparalleled in human literature. His words could hardly have been fewer if he had lived in our time of feverish haste and tumult. To put up the heavens and the earth in one chapter was a miracle in authorship, yet, well pondered, it was the only thing to be done,—any poet could have built them in endless stanzas, and any philosopher could have begun the infinite story in a book too large for the world to hold: Moses chose the more excellent way, creating creation with a swiftness that has dazed a literal criticism ever since;—literal criticism that has but one season in its dreary year, a year that knows nothing of snow-blossom, or wedded light and song. But this very haste was part

of the man. The Moses of poetry required fifty-one days for the revolution of his Iliad ; the Moses of revelation only took a week for the settlement of the heavens and the earth, and in that week he found one whole day of rest for the Creator. This action was entirely characteristic of Moses, for he was the most wrathful man as well as the meekest,—killing, smiting, destroying, and burning with anger, as well as praying like the father-priest of his people. In a sense obvious enough he was the protoplasmic Christ,—for was not he who described himself as “meek and lowly in heart,” the scourger of trespassers, and did he not burn the religious actors of his day ? Moses and Christ both did things with startling rapidity ; in their very soul they were akin ; they were “straitened” until their work was “accomplished,”—the Pentateuch and the Gospels have action enough in them to fill innumerable volumes, yet there is an infinite calm in both, the haste being in the temporary framework, the calm being in the eternal purpose.

Think of these seven-and-twenty chapters constituting the discipline of one month. The reflections started by this circumstance culminate in a sense of pain, for who can bear this grievous toil or endure this sting of accusation ? There is no respite. Egyptian burdens were for the body, but those wilderness exactions tormented the soul, and by so much made Egyptian memories bright. The trial of muscle is nothing to the trial of patience. Men may sleep after labour, but an unquiet conscience keeps the eyes wide open. This discipline afflicted both the body and the soul, and thus drained the entire strength of the people. This conscious toil must have been accompanied by an unconscious inspiration, a reciprocal action impossible in theory but well understood in spiritual experience. We resume our burdens in the very act of dreading them. We pray the next prayer in the very process of waiting for answers to a thousand prayers to which God has paid no known heed. Yesterday's sacrifice has nothing to do with this day's sin, except

to remind us, that to-day must provide its own sacrifice. This was so with the Jews ; this is precisely so with ourselves, yet we boast our liberty, and suppose that in leaping one inch from the earth we have broken the tether of gravitation. As put before us in this manual called Leviticus the discipline of the month seems to be more than we could endure, and this we say in ignorance of the fact that our own manual imposes a severer discipline. Our pity for the Jews arises out of the apparently ineradicable sophism that spiritual service is easier than bodily exercise. A most deadly sophism is this, and prevalent yet, notwithstanding the rebuke and condemnation of universal history. It was not in dressing and keeping the garden that Adam failed, but in obedience, in spiritual trust, in child-like simplicity. Not a word is said about indolence ;—garden-keeping is an easy virtue ; but to obey, to trust, to love, to be truly true in all the heart's loyalty and hope, who is sufficient? Not Eve, not Adam,—not woman, not man. It was a bold thing on the part of any fabulist to fix the point of failure in the heart ; an inspired fabulist may-be,—an allegorist under the very touch of God. Yet disobedient man must always be brought back by bodily subjugation, simply because the body responds quickly to the chastisement of justice. The flesh aches, and burns, and begs like a coward that the smiter will drop his lash. Spiritual reproach, affectionate entreaty, argument made strong by a thousand unanswerable pleas, go for nothing ; but one stroke of the cutting thong brings the criminal to beg for mercy. It is easier to get at the bone than to get at the conscience. That is the difference between a martyr and a criminal,—a man all spirit and a man all body. The Christian manual has but little to say to the body, except through the medium of the spirit, but through that medium it has much to say. Not until the spirit is right can the body be right ; but the spirit being right the body becomes a holy temple and a living sacrifice. The Jews kept up a magnificent tragedy of symbolism,

but Christians must represent an infinitely more magnificent tragedy of reality. It was easy to kill a bullock at the door of the tabernacle, or to slay a sheep on the northward side of the altar, or to pluck away the crop of the turtle-dove or young pigeon, and cast it beside the altar on the east part by the place of the ashes ; but who can slay a will, or burn a purpose, or give up every pulse of the heart's love ; who can nail his vanity to the cross, or shut out the charming world, or slay the pleading senses one by one, or crucify the passion set on fire of hell ?

In no spiritual sense, then, is Leviticus an obsolete book. Moses is not dead. The inventors of the alphabet have some rights even in *Paradise Lost*, and quite a large property in *Euclid*. It is not grateful on our part to forget the primers through which we passed to the encyclopædias, though their authors were but our intellectual nurses. In no mere dream was Moses present when Christ communed with him concerning the Exodus that was to be accomplished at Jerusalem, and in no dramatic sense did Elijah watch the consummation of prophecy. Marvellous fables, lies grand enough to be true, ventures heroic enough to be divine, and all massed into coherence without trace of joint or seam ;—verily it is easier to believe than to disbelieve, to pray than to sneer ! The wonder is that Christians should be so willing to regard the Pentateuch as obsolete. This is practically a foregone conclusion, to such an extent certainly that the Pentateuch is tolerated rather than studied for edification by the rank and file of Christians. Without the Pentateuch Christ as revealed in the Gospels would have been impossible, and without Christ the Pentateuch would have been impossible. I venture upon this proposition because I find no great event in the Pentateuch that is not for some purpose of argument or illustration used by Christ himself or by his disciples and apostles in the interests of what is known as evangelical truth. It lies within easy proof that Christ is the text of the Old

Testament and that the Old Testament is the text of Christ. What use is made in the New Testament of the creation of the universe, the faith of Abraham, the rain of manna, the lifting up of the serpent, and the tabernacle of witness; the sublime apology of Stephen epitomises the Old Testament, and the epistle to the Hebrews could not have been written but for the ritual of Exodus and Leviticus. In its purely moral tone the Old Testament is of kindred quality with the New. Take an instance from Leviticus. Three forms of evil are recognised in one of its most ardent chapters, namely Violence, Deceit, and Perjury, a succession amounting to a development, and unwittingly, it may or may not be, confirming that law of evolution which is as happily illustrated in morals as in physics. Men begin with acts of violence, then go on to silent deceit and calculation, and then close with a profanation of the holiest terms,—the early sinners robbed gardens and killed brothers; the later sinners “agreed together” to “lie unto God.” It is something, therefore, to find in so ancient a book as Leviticus the recognition of an order which is true to philosophy and to history. But the proof that Moses and Christ are identical in moral tone is to be found in the process which offenders were commanded to adopt. By no sacerdotal jugglery was the foul blot to be removed; by no sigh of selfishness could the inward corruption be permitted to evaporate; by no investment of cheap tears could thieves compound for felony. First, there must be restoration; then there must be an addition of a fifth part of the whole; then the priest must be faced as the very representative of God and a trespass-offering be laid upon the altar, and after atonement Forgiveness would come, a white angel from heaven, and dwell in the reclaimed and sanctified heart,—all the past driven away as a black cloud, and all the present filled with a light above the brightness of the sun. What is this but an outline or forecast of what Christ himself said when he drove the hostile and vindictive man from

the altar, bidding him first be reconciled with his brother and at peace with society? Christianity is not a substitute for morality; it is morality inspired, glorified and crowned.

Say that the ritual was sanitary rather than doctrinal or theological. What then? All divine things are first sanitary, but not necessarily bounded by that term. By admitting that the ritual was sanitary we begin an *à fortiori* argument of infinite cogency, instead of abandoning the definitely theological position. If the body requires so much care, what of the spirit? If the laws of bodily health were revealed, has no message been delivered to the soul? Is cleanliness vital, and purity quite unimportant? Is leprosy deadly, and internal cancer most harmless? No degradation of the Deity is more obvious than the thought which bounds his revelation and his discipline by the wants of a body which must die, or by an occasion which is as mechanical as it is transient. It would, too, be a circumstance wholly unprecedented if God had suddenly changed the level of his movement, by coming down from the purpose to crush the serpent's head and reinstate his own image, to the direction of ablutions, donations, and ordinances, without metaphysical meaning or religious intent. The irony would involve profanity. In the estimate of such a book as Leviticus something is due to the argument founded upon harmony. Something, too, is due to the history and genius of names. To call a stone upon which flesh is burned for sanitary purposes an *altar* is to mock the very spirit of every honest paganism; and to call a health-officer, or inspector of nuisances, a *priest* is to be frivolous at the expense of decency. The larger interpretation is generally the right one, right by virtue of its nobleness, and right by virtue of the effects which must follow its practical application. It is along this line that one of the most powerful arguments for the inspiration of the Bible reveals itself. Take, for example, this very book of Leviticus: do not, in the first instance, vex the mind by

the mere detail, but inquire into the central thought and purpose of the writer, and let the detail adjust itself. Grant that the innermost thought of the book is the idea which may be represented by the word *cleanness*. That term fixes the point of inspiration, and not only its point but its measure and quality. Anything else may be simply incidental and illustrative; it is enough to seize the inspired term and magnify it by natural evolution into its whole meaning, so that every point of the area may be covered. It will be found that the practice of genuine cleanness, chemical as well as mechanical, will be followed by a philosophy, and that the morality of cleanness will be followed by a theology. Accustom a man to look out for bullocks and rams and lambs "without blemish," and he will find that he cannot stop at that point; he has begun an education which can only culminate in the prayer—"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me," though no word of that holy thought was named in the original instructions. This view of inspiration need not create any alarm, for it has been invariably adopted in the interpretation of the parables of Jesus Christ, and by its adoption the central purpose of each parable has been relieved of every complication arising from the use of merely pictorial and symbolical terms. Of necessity it is only the *thought* that can be divinely inspired, because the words are part of the common speech of the world and are tainted by misuse, or burdened with grievous responsibilities. Thus God is put to disadvantage by having to employ terms which have been disennobled by mutilation and false setting. But this difficulty is wholly got rid of by looking for the inspired thought, the one idea, the sacred purpose, the spirituality that cannot be polluted or defaced. If, therefore, the idea of Leviticus is cleanness it is useless to deny its inspiration; it is useless, too, to imagine that cleanness is a commonplace, for all history proves the contrary, and useless to attempt to put partial cleanness in the place of absolute cleanness, for then by parity of

reasoning partial honesty would be sufficient, and partial sanity would be the same thing as a sound mind.

That this view is not fanciful may be tested by applying its doctrine to any and every part of the Bible. It dissolves every difficulty, and invests the record with complete and immutable authority. Take one or two perplexing instances for the purpose of illustrating its philosophy. For example, the command to offer Isaac : the frivolous objections to the account as it stands in the English version cannot but be well remembered ; grammar has attempted to rearrange some of the words ; the customs of heathen nations are supposed to have suggested the mechanism of the offering ; and so, by external processes, men have tried to bring the narrative within the lines of probability. But why this elision of the word "burnt" and the heathenising of the term "knife" when the central thought of the incident is so evidently noble,—that central thought being that all we have is God's, and that nothing, how dear soever and tender, is to stand between the heart and absolute obedience to the divine will ? The frivolity which quibbles about the fire and the knife, quibbles about Dives and Lazarus, because of Abraham's bosom and the realism of the rich man's body suffering at the very moment when his flesh was buried in the earth. Thus the spirit is sacrificed to the letter, and inspiration is either impoverished or debased. Look for a moment, in further illustration, at such a book as the Song of Solomon. Again and again it has been pointed out that a Song so luscious in its love is surely not an inspired poem ; it is unworthy of a place in so sublime a book as the Bible ; it is infatuated sentimentalism ; it is the very disease of love. I venture to deny the charge, and to claim inspiration for the Song. What is the central thought of the poem ? It is the supreme love of the soul for Christ. *That* is the inspired thought ; as for "the kisses of his mouth," the "checks comely with rows of jewels," the house of cedar, and the chariot of the wood of Lebanon, these are but struggles to express the inex-

pressible ; and therefore to quibble about the head being as most fine gold, the neck being like the tower of David, and the eyes being as the eyes of doves by the rivers of water, is to sacrifice that which is substantial to that which is incidental, and to displace inspiration in favour of the formalities of mechanism.

Leviticus is the gospel of the Pentateuch, glistening with purity, turning law into music, and spreading a banquet in the wilderness. But its ritual is dead. This is hard to believe ; hard because religious vanity is fond of ritualism, and ritualism makes no demand upon the deepest conscience : yet ritualism had a divinely-appointed function in the education of the awakening mind, and was the only influence which could hold the attention of a people to whom freedom was a new experience. Spectacular religion is alphabetic religion, and therefore to revert to it is to ignore every characteristic and impulse of manhood and progress. But they who say so, must be prepared to complete the philosophy which that contention initiates. It is not enough to dismiss ritualism on the ground that it has been displaced by spiritual worship ; admit that such is the case, and other and broader admissions are involved in the plea, and can only be shirked at the expense of consistency. It is generally admitted, for example, that the Old Testament law has been displaced by a New Testament principle. So Ritualism and Law, in their ancient forms, have passed away. But let us be careful. When we say Ritualism and Law, we mean in reality the *letter*, and it is evident that if any one letter can be displaced every other letter may be outlived and completed. And what is "the letter" but the symbol of flesh, visibleness, objectivity, historic fact and bulk ? The Apostle Paul went so far as to say that even Christ was no longer known "after the flesh"—yea, though he had been known after the flesh, that kind of knowledge was for ever done away, and another knowledge had permanently taken its place. The Church has never

adopted the whole meaning of that teaching. Willing enough to consign Leviticus to the shades, the Church still clings to some sort of bodily Christ, the figure of a man, a bulk to be at least imaginatively touched. This is easily accounted for without suggesting superstition, and yet it might be done away with without imperilling faith. We are held in bondage by a mistaken conception of personality. When we think of that term we think of ourselves. But even admitting the necessity of this, we may by a correct definition of personality acquire a higher conception of our own being. Instead of saying that personality is this or that, after the manner of a geometrical figure, binding it to four points and otherwise limiting it, say that personality is the unit of being, and instantly every conception is enlarged and illuminated, the meaning being that personality is the starting point of conscious existence, not the fulness but the outline, not the *maximum* but the *minimum*, the very smallest conception which the mind can lay hold of,—the Euclidian “point” to be carried on into ratios and dimensions which originate a new vocabulary. We do not, then, define “God” when we describe him as a “Person,” we merely *begin* to define him; in other words, we say, God cannot be *less* than a Person, what more he is we must gradually and adoringly discover. So far as Christ is concerned there is one enlargement of his personality which no school of thinkers will dispute, rhetorically expressed by M. Renan, when he says of Jesus—“A thousand times more living, a thousand times more loved since thy death than during the days of thy pilgrimage here below, thou wilt become to such a degree the Corner Stone of humanity, that to tear thy name from this world would be to shake it to its foundations.” If ritualism has been displaced by spirituality, and if law has been suspended by a principle—in other words, if the local has made way for the universal—why shrink from the admission that limited personality has been exchanged for unlimited Influence? If along that line of thought

any sincere and reverent mind can go out in adoration and thankfulness, why embarrass its noble and ennobling rapture by unprofitable, because indeterminable, discussions upon the metaphysics of personality? I have no difficulty whatever in realising the personality of Christ, and in that recognition I find the strength and joy peculiarly needed by one order or quality of mind, so much so that without it life would be de-centralised and prayer would fail of its destiny, but where other minds can find rest and inspiration it is better that they should live high up in sunshine than that they pine in the prison of darkness. In the one case profit is possible; in the other death is certain.

Contemporary judgment and charity may be assisted, in view of the ever-enlarging future, by imagining the writer of Leviticus face to face with the Church of the present time. Note the extreme singularity of the circumstances. We say (some hardly knowing what they mean) that the book is inspired, yet no ordinance of it is perpetuated; we say that the book is canonical, yet no ritual obligation is binding; on no account could we permit the elision of the book, yet no one observance would we reproduce. We claim, too, that our religion has in some way absorbed, fulfilled, completed, and abolished the book by consummation, in other words it is claimed that Christianity is Judaism interpreted and glorified. From our standpoint, particularly if we are clerically minded—this construction may be satisfactory, but the immediate question is, How would *Moses* regard nineteenth century worship, say of a Low Church and Evangelical type, as the true evolution of Leviticus? Where is the resemblance? The eye that can see the similitude is surely looking through an adapted medium. Yet the mystery would be dissolved if the book of Leviticus were not open to reference. The man is the completion of the child, but the child is no longer in existence: the fruit is the fulfilment of the blossom, but the blossom is no longer available for comparison or

contrast. Christianity is the consummation of Leviticus, but Leviticus remains, unlike the child and the blossom, and offers a series of dissonances or dissimilarities, of the most positive quality. Yet if Moses were living now he would be unchurched if he refused to identify the meaning of Leviticus in the service of the Christian sanctuary—the Papist nearest in gorgeousness, the Protestant claiming to be nearest in doctrine, and the Nonconformist Moses would, in the absence of inspiration, be, in this matter, the arch-heretic of the century.

LEVITICUS.

Leviticus i. 1.

“And the Lord called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation.”

THE ANCIENT RITUAL.

WHEN the Ten Commandments were given the Lord called unto Moses from the top of mount Sinai. Now he calls from “the tent of meeting.” He is about to speak more minutely, and to enter upon statements which were better made in the quietness of a holy place, than delivered in a theatre of lightning and thunder and earthquake. The one was a great declaration of morals, a solemn code of behaviour or action ; the other related to sacrifice, worship, divine communion and the whole life of the heart. The lightning and the thunder have passed, and the earth throbs and heaves no longer, but is quieted to hear the peaceful law. Moses enters the sanctuary. It is a church made with hands, and it stands at the foot of “the mount which burned with fire.” Sometimes our worship seems to require ALL SPACE, so much are our souls exalted, and so loud is our cry of distress or our psalm of adoration. The mountain is not high enough, the sea is wanting in width, and the horizon is too near to constitute a church, because our souls are lifted up with great emotions and our love glows with an infinite fire. In those high moods we tell the mountains to rejoice ; we bid Lebanon clap its hands ; and call upon the sea to help our offering of praise. Afterwards we fall into another and calmer mood ; a mood subdued almost into timidity ; then we would curtain ourselves in and draw our former publicity within

the bounds of comparative secrecy. The sky is too vast ; we are afraid of its very immensity ; so under roof and lamp of our own making we render our worship, giving God praise, and whispering the prayer which is almost spoiled by speech. This verse gives us the picture of God and man meeting in a holy place ; say in close quarters ; say as if space were annihilated and the infinite had taken up the finite into itself. Man needs instruction in the art or act of worship. The worship itself may be what is sometimes called instinctive. Hence man has been called a religious being ; hence we are told that worship or the spirit of worship is in man ; and hence too we have been mistakenly told that every man may worship God as he pleases. That is a sophism which needs exposure. The will of man has no place whatever in worship, except to receive the direction or command of God as to its expression. There are emotions of the heart, inarticulate sometimes, fierce sometimes, tender emotions of every force and tone that run through the whole gamut of human feeling ; but we are not to say which part shall be uttered and which shall be silent ; we are like little children to be taught how to worship our Father God.

“Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock.

If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish : he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord.

And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering ; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.

And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord : and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces.

And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire :

And the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar :

But his inwards and his legs shall he wash in water : and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord ” (i. 2-9).

Here is a singular conjunction of the legal and the voluntary. Jehovah fixes the particulars ; but the man himself decides on the act of sacrificial worship. Observe how the Lord works

from the opposite point from which the first of the Ten Commandments was given. There God called for the worship : here he leaves the man to offer the worship and proceeds to tell him how. The first was general, the second was particular. The offering was to be of the cattle ; it was to be a male without blemish ; it was to be offered at the door of the tabernacle ; the priests were to do part and the man himself was to do part. So we see again that man needs instruction in the act of worship. The question must ever arise, How shall we come before God ? The disciples of Jesus Christ came to him, and said, " Lord, teach us how to pray." We all pray ; we cannot help praying. Sometimes in our secularistic pride we only use such common words as " I wish," " I long for," " I hope," " I desire,"—these are feeble ways of putting what is in every human heart, namely, the desire which means prayer. Jesus Christ taught his disciples how to pray, that is, he gave them instruction as to the meaning and mode of worship. So then, we have a manner or science of worship even in the Christian sanctuary, dictated and authorised by Jesus Christ himself. The preparation of the heart and the answer of the tongue are from God. No man was at liberty in the ancient Church to determine his own terms of approach to God. The throne must be approached in the appointed way. We are not living in an era of religious licentiousness. There is a genius of worship, there is a method of coming before God. God does not ask us to conceive or suggest methods of worship. He himself meets us with his time-bill and his terms of spiritual commerce. God is in heaven and we are upon the earth ; therefore should our words be few. The law of approach to the divine throne is unchanged. The very first condition of worship is obedience. Obedience is better than sacrifice, and is so because it is the end of sacrifice. But see, how under the Levitical ritual, the worshipper was trained to obedience. Mark the exasperating minuteness of the law. Nothing was left to haphazard. The bullock was to be offered at the door of the tabernacle ; the sheep was to be killed on the northward side of the altar ; the blood of the fowl was to be wrung out at the side of the altar ; the crop was to be plucked away with the feathers and was to be cast on the east side of the altar by the place of the ashes ; fine flour and oil were to be the

ingredients of the meat offering, whether it was burnt upon the altar or baked in the oven, or in the frying-pan, and loaves and honey were not to enter into the sacrifice by fire. So the law runs on until it chafes the obstinate mind. But man was to yield. He had no choice. His iron will was to be broken in two and his soul was to wait patiently upon God. When, however, we are in the spirit of filial obedience the very minuteness of the law becomes a delight. God does not speak to us in the gross; every motion is watched, every action is determined, every breathing is regulated; man is always to yield; he is not a co-partner in this high thinking. So our inventive genius of a religious kind often stands rebuked before God. We like to make ceremonies; methods of worship seem to tempt one side of our fertile genius, and we stultify ourselves by regarding our inventiveness as an element of our devotion. We like to draw up programmes and orders and schemes of service and sacrifice. What we should do is to keep as nearly as we can to the Biblical line, and bring all our arrangements into harmony with the law of heaven. The law can never give way. Fire never surrenders; it is the fuel that must go down.

The worship was to be offered through mediation. In every sacrifice the priests, Aaron or the sons of Aaron, were present. The priestly element pervades the universe; it is the mystery of life and service. The sinner did not come immediately before God and transact his business with the Infinite face to face. Is there then any priestly element in Christianity? It is the very consummation of priestliness. Our sacrifices are acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Our great High Priest is passed into the heavens. There is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. Jesus is the Mediator of the new covenant. The difficulty with us is that we think we can all be official priests. We forget that now there is only one Man who continueth for ever, because he hath an unchangeable priesthood. Jesus is the Intercessor, he pleads his blood; his cross is in heaven; it rests against the throne. "I saw in the midst of the throne a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." All things are coloured with his blood. It is a great mystery and not to be understood by reason in its cold moods; only when we are burning with unutterable love to God, do we catch any hint of

the meaning of these sovereign mysteries. We have no need of priestly help from any human point of view. Brethren pray for us. Ministers will pray for their people, but not as their substitutes ; their prayers are eloquent with the cry of human necessity and the psalm of human adoration. Not in any priestly but in a profoundly sympathetic sense, we are all priests in Christ—a holy priesthood.

The service was voluntary. Notice the expression, "He shall offer it of his own voluntary will." The voluntariness gives the value to the worship. We can only pray with the *heart*. Prayers we can say with the mouth, but to say prayers may not be to pray. To pay a tax is to keep a law, but to give bread to the hungry is to draw out the heart and to put a gift in the very hand of God. So in Christian worship, the voluntary and the legal are combined. There is in this great ritual a wonderful mixing of free will and divine ordination ; the voluntary and the unchangeable ; the human action and the divine decree. We cannot understand it ; if we are able to understand it then it is no larger than our understanding : so God becomes a measurable god, merely the shadow of human wit, a god that cannot be worshipped. It is where our understanding fails or rises into a new wealth of faith, that we find the only altar at which we can bow, with all our powers, where we can utter with enthusiasm all our hopes and desires. So we come with our sacrifice and offering, whatever it may be, and having laid it on the altar, we can follow it no further—free as the air up to a given point, but after that bounded and fixed and watched and regulated—a mystery that can never be solved, and that can never be chased out of a universe in which the Infinite and finite confer.

The worship of the ancient Church was no mere expression of sentiment. It was a most practical worship ; not a sentimental exercise ; it was a confession and an expiation,—in a word an atonement. This fact explains all. Take the word "atonement" out of Christian theology, and Christian theology has no centre, no circumference, no life, no meaning, no virtue. See the man bringing his bullock—what is he going to do ? To make God a present ? He is going to confess sin ; he is about to say, "My sin deserves death, but it hath pleased thee, mighty King, to accept a type of my death, therefore do I shed the blood of this beast

before thee." He is about to say, "Sin means suffering; suffering must accompany sin;" to express it therefore did he put the knife into that dedicated bullock. We have lost many of the spiritual ideas, I fear, suggested by this symbolism, from the range of our Christian worship. Who remembers that sin is a debt? Who brings before his mind in all its pathos and humiliating effect the great fact that sin must be confessed, admitted, specifically owned,—that each man must say "*My sin*"? Who is there that really feels that he is not master of his own sin, having power to put an end to it as if he had never committed it? The devil says, "You have sinned; that may be perfectly true, but what you have got to do is to repent of your sin, and all will be well." He knows that our repentances, unless springing from the right source and regulated by the right influence, do but harden the heart and give the tempter a wider sweep and advantage over us. The enemy says to the withered branch perishing by the roadside, "It is quite true that you are withered, but repent, and all will be well." Never. There must come a hand that can lift the branch up and put it back in the tree, so that it may draw the life-juice from the root and connect itself with the all-blessing sun. A vital work must be done. You cannot wash yourself clean. The sea will not wash you. The cleansing is an act Divine.

The ancient worship was marked by every variety of offering. What a wonderful list do we find in the first three chapters of Leviticus! A bullock, a sheep, a turtle-dove, a young pigeon, fine flour, first-fruits, a goat. The great law seems to say to us, "What have you to offer?" The law is not hard and fast. The rich man and the poor man each has his opportunity. They could not all bring alike; it was not every man who had a bullock to offer, or a turtle-dove, or a young pigeon, or a handful of flour,—the meaning was the same; the meaning was not to be measured by the gift; the gift itself was the meaning when measured by the heart. Has this time of oblation passed? It cannot pass; only our offering is no longer an atonement, it is now a grateful expression for an atonement already offered. So the Lord says to each of us, "What have you?" One man has time, and gives it willingly unto the Lord; another has social influence, and is true to his Saviour in the exercise of all the power that comes

out of his station in society ; another has sympathy,—power of advising, entering into other people's feelings and encouraging them, in all good and holy ways. The Lord takes what we have. He blesses the giver and the gift.

If we could read this book of Leviticus through at one sitting, the result might be expressed in some such words as these,—“Thank God we have got rid of this infinite labour ; thank God this is not in the Christian service ; thank God we are Christians and not Jews.” Let not our rejoicing be the expression of selfishness or folly. It is true we have escaped the bondage of the letter, but only to enter into the larger and sweeter bondage of the spirit. It makes the heart sore to think that so many persons are under the impression that Christianity is a do-nothing religion, and that by becoming Christians we enter into the liberty of idleness. When we think of the bullock, and the sheep, and the goat, and the turtle-dove, and the young pigeon, and the fine flour, the heave-offering, and the wave-offering, and the trespass-offering—offerings all the year round, never ending, or ending only to begin again ; the smoke always ascending, the fire always alight, we say, “Thank God we are Christians.” What do we mean ? Had the Jew more to do than we have to do ? No ; or only so in a very limited and mechanical sense. The Jew gave his bullock or his goat, his turtle-dove or his young pigeon ; but now each man has to give *himself*. We now buy ourselves off with gold. Well may the apostle exhort us, saying, “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” Wonderful is the law which lays its claim upon the ransomed soul,—none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself ; whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; whether we die, we die unto the Lord ; living or dying we are the Lord's. We have escaped measurable taxation, but we have come under the bond of immeasurable love. We have escaped the letter, we have been brought under the dominion of the spirit. Let us be careful, therefore, how we congratulate ourselves on having escaped the goat-offering and heifer-offering, and turtle-dove and young pigeon sacrifices ; how we have been brought away from the technicality and poverty of the letter into the still further deeper poverty of selfishness. As Christians, we have

nothing that is our own ; not a moment of time is ours ; not a pulse that throbs in us, not a hair of our head, not a coin in the coffer belongs to us. This is the severe demand of love. Who can rise to the pitch of that self-sacrifice ? None. The Jew gives his tenth, and another tenth, and another tenth, and another tenth, even unto five-tenths, or one-half, and we say, " All that is done for ever ; it has passed away with the obsolete ritual, and now we are under the law of love," as if God had brought us into something less rather than into something more. The Jew had a night in which he might rest from his labour, but in Christianity, as to the spiritual exactions of its service it may be truly said there is no night ; if we cease from the more active labour during the night it is that we may be prepared to resume it with increased energy with the first light of dawn.

NOTE.

Five animals are named in the Law as suitable for sacrifice ; the ox, the sheep, the goat, the dove, and the pigeon. It is worthy of notice that these were all offered by Abraham in the great sacrifice of the Covenant (see Gen. xv. 9). These animals are all clean, according to the division into clean and unclean animals, which was adopted in the Law. They were the most important of those which are used for food, and are of the greatest utility to man. The three kinds of quadrupeds were domesticated in flocks and herds, and were recognised as property, making up in fact a great part of the wealth of the Hebrews before they settled in Palestine. It would thus appear that three conditions met in the sacrificial quadrupeds: (1) they were clean according to the Law ; (2) they were commonly used as food ; and being domesticated (3) they formed part of the home-wealth of the sacrificers.—*Abridged from the Speaker's Commentary.*

Leviticus i.

THE CHANGEABLE AND THE UNCHANGEABLE.

IN addition to what we have already said, there are some things in this first chapter which will justify varied repetition. What an important part the word "if" plays in the opening chapters of Leviticus! At first we did not seem to see it, but by frequent repetition it urges itself upon our notice as a term of vital importance in the argument of the subject, whatever that subject may be. We cannot enter into the subject except through the gate *if*. It is God's word. The meaning must be profound; the meaning must be in excess of the visible insignificance of the word. It is but a film of a word after all. Is there a less word in all the language? Yet it is no film in its moral significance and in its moral effect; it is a granite wall thicker than the earth and high as the sky. Even God condescends to make terms with us. One of the greatest of English writers has been perplexed by the suggestion that God is almighty. He says—No; either His almightiness must be surrendered, or His all-goodness. If He were almighty, He never could permit the evil which is now afflicting mankind. The argument is inconclusive, hiding, from my point of view, a most obvious sophism. Yet this is a ground upon which the almightiness of God must be surrendered. He is no mightier than we in one direction. Viewed in the light of that direction we would seem to be almighty. We can withhold our consent or we can give it. A great *if* must be crossed before even God can continue his purposes of wisdom and love in our education and redemption. We are almighty in obstinacy. The word is not unfamiliar; we hear it in the expression, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." God has fixed the time, made the proposition, offered the whole hospitality of his heart and heaven, and then waits for our treatment of his necessary *if*. We hear it in the statement latest in all the sacred

books, "If any man will open the door." What! Cannot God break through any door that ever was framed and fashioned? No! To break through is not his object. Destruction is but the very poorest aspect of the working of almightiness. God's aim is persuasion, the winning of consent, the bringing over of the whole force of the will: and then almightiness must stand still and wait a beggar's answer. Nowhere is the greatness of man so broadly and vividly confessed as in the Bible. They do injustice to Holy Scripture who suppose that it is continually contemning, abusing, and degrading human nature. The whole scheme of education and redemption revealed in the Bible awaits the consent of the creature. God is ready, and we keep him waiting at the door; the King is in the chariot, and the horses are prancing, eager to be gone on some celestial journey, and we keep them all waiting. It is a daring assumption. No book that is not conscious of infinite resources and vindications could base itself upon such a theory of human nature.

Through the gate *if* we enter into the temple of obedience. Having crossed the threshold, then law begins to operate. After the *if* comes the discipline—the sweet, but often painful necessity. Observe the balance of operation: Man must reply; having replied, either in one form or the other, necessary consequences follow. It is so in all life. There is no exception in what is known as the religious consciousness and activity. The great sea says in its wild waves, "If ye will walk on me and become citizens of this wilderness of water, then you must submit to the law of the country; you must fall into the rhythm of the universe; you must build your wooden houses or your iron habitations according to laws old as God; you need not come upon my waters; I do not ask you to come; when you come I will obliterate your footprints so that no man may ever know that you have crossed me; but if you come you must obey." The earth says, "If ye will build upon me, please yourselves: I do not ask you to build upon me; I shall swing around the sun if no stone be laid upon the top of another, and be as glad in my path of light as though I carried temples and towers and cities; but if ye will build, you must obey the law; I cast down everything that is out of plumb; I will not carry any structure with any guarantee of permanence that is not built by the geometry

of the sun; I do not ask you to build, but if you build you then come under the dominion of laws which cannot be set aside permanently. For a time they may be evaded or trifled with, or apparently suspended; but they will assert their permanence and vindicate their justice." We have therefore no liberty after a certain time. That is quite right; it is the law of all life. But we never give up our liberty in response to the laws of the universe without our surrender being compensated after God's measure. We are accustomed to speak of the law: we quote sharp and imperative terms from the Pentateuch, saying, "These words are very emphatic, and are all-inclusive, and often touch the point of severity; they do not tamper with us, or compromise with us, or leave us any liberty." That is an unjust criticism, if it be all we have to say. There was a time when God was suppliant; there was an hour in which he prayed; there was a time when God was on his knees asking a beggar to allow him heart-room. Let us therefore take in the whole case, and state it in all its lines and elements, and we shall find a marvellous harmony of forces—a union and reconciliation constituting a coherent and sublime ministry.

We call this the law, but it is the law with a golden fringe of mercy. The law gave great choice of offering. It said, "If you bring a burnt offering, bring it of the herd if you have one. If you have not a herd of cattle, bring it of the flocks; bring it of the flock of the sheep; but if you are too poor to have a flock of sheep, bring a goat from the flock of the goats; only in all cases this condition must be permanent: whatever you offer must be without blemish. But if you have no cattle, no sheep, no goats, then bring it of the fowls: bring turtle-doves or young pigeons; the air is full of them, and the poorest man can take them." Is that not mercy twice blessed? We are not all masters of cattle that browse upon the green hills; nor are we all flockmasters, and amongst flockmasters there are rich and poor. God says, "Let your offering be according to your circumstances, only without blemish, and it shall be accepted."

What was the object of the offerings? Atonement. What is the meaning of the word "atone"? To cover. How then does the word *atone* refer to sin? By covering it, hiding it, concealing it and so destroying it. The object of the offerings was to atone,

to cover, to hide. "Blessed is the man whose sin is covered"—and sin can only be covered or hidden in one way. No cloth of human weaving can ever conceal it; it will rise and show its figure before the vision of the world through all the silk and purple ever thrown upon it. There is an appointed covering; have we accepted it? Observe, this is the law of all life. To atone in the sense of covering is not a religious idea only; it is the thing which is being done every day by every man. Where, then, is the awful dogmatism of the Scriptures, and the appalling arbitrariness of the divine decrees and requirements? God looks down from heaven and sees us engaged in the continual endeavour to cover our sin, and he says, "It cannot be done; you have undertaken the impossible; that miracle does not lie within the compass of human invention or mortal strength; you are right in endeavouring to cover it; you are working according to a law, the full operation of which you do not understand; I will provide the covering." One reason for attending to the proposition is that all our coverings have failed. We have heaped rocks upon the sin, and the tremendous vitality of the wrong has heaved off the rock; we have bribed the sin to be quiet, and it has devoured our investments and balances and prosperities, and has then looked at us with a look of insatiable hunger. Knowing this, we are prepared to listen to the new proposal. God undertakes what we ourselves have been undertaking and failing in. It may be the Lord will succeed where we have been baffled by mocking perplexities.

What was the method of the offerings? The hands were to be laid upon the head of the victim. Whether the priest laid his hands upon it or the man himself, the act was symbolic and representative—a most beautiful and pathetic symbol. The hands were laid upon the head, and the meaning of the imposition was that the sin was communicated by being recognised, acknowledged, confessed with a contrite heart. These are symbols we must not take out of human history until we are prepared to remove from the history of our race one of the most pathetic signs which has blessed it with religious accentuation. "My faith would lay her hands on that dear head of thine."

We say that all this is changed. Is it? What is changed?

I am not aware that the change has taken place in any sense that would justify contempt for the ancient history. Changes have taken place, but they have only transpired in the sense of completion and fulfilment. What is confirmed? God has chosen the offering now. We are no longer called upon to say,—Shall it be a burnt sacrifice of the herd? or shall the offering be of the flocks, whether of the sheep or of the goats? or shall the burnt sacrifice be of fowls, whether turtle-doves or young pigeons? But we are called upon to accept God's choice: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"—the Son of man for the sons of men, Emmanuel: God with us—always explaining itself to the consciousness and the necessity and the love, but never condescending to exchange the mystery for words which men can change into pointless controversy. What is changed?—The mere mechanism, the personal expense, the humiliation—undoubtedly, but not the Atonement. Really next to nothing has been changed. The accidentals or accessories have all been changed, but the central truth—the Atonement—remains for ever. There is no short and easy method with sin. It never has been one of the easy problems of human history. It has pained all men. It has distressed the supreme intellect of the world, and brought that intellect into the darkness and silence of despair. It has driven men away to find in beauty some solace for a conscious hideousness within; and men have found it to be cold and monotonous work, to be worshipping unresponsive sculpture, painting, and art of every name and kind. Men have sought by excess of the very thing itself to destroy sin, and if they could have gone forward from indulgence to indulgence, from insanity to insanity, they might have escaped the remorse of this world; but God has so constituted the universe that men have moments of sobriety, times of mental and moral reaction, periods in which they see themselves and their destiny with an appalling vividness, and in those hours it is found that the sin which began the mischief is still there. There is no way out of it but God's way. We have tried most of the ways ourselves, and it is but just to acknowledge that all our trials have ended only in the embitterment of our lot. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from

all unrighteousness." Seeing therefore that I must grapple with this problem of sin : that in proportion as I grow in wisdom I am conscious of the presence of the sin—something that marks the fairest sheet upon which I would write my history, something that plagues the heart in its innermost delights, something that twists and perverts everything I do that is of the quality of goodness—I will look into God's proposal. It is a proposal amounting to a miracle. He says, "Your sin is red like crimson, I will make it white as snow ; it is a scarlet thing, I will make it like speckless wool : come now, let us reason together." It is for me to accept the invitation. This will I do : I will arise and go to my Father, and say unto him, "I have sinned, and the spot marks the guilt I can never erase." What is changed? Not the priestly idea, though the priestly person is changed. There is one Mediator, or Priest, between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. We have a High Priest that abideth for ever. All we do in relation to the heavens we do through the medium of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Priest of the universe. He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us.

So then, now I examine the change, I find it is practically no change at all. In things accidental, accessory, contributory, in mere externals, the change is very great, but a very great change within a very small compass. What is left is this : God, sin, atonement, priestliness. Now I understand what Jesus said : "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets : I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." What remains? The different offerings, they remain. We can never offer the same thing to God. Every man offers according to his quality and resources. What is prayer to one man is no prayer to another. God is judge. If I bring a turtle-dove or a young pigeon, when I might have brought the head of the herd, the poor bird will not be accepted ; it will fly downwards. If I bring out of the flocks the best of the sheep, it will not be accepted if I could have brought my sacrifice of the herd, a male without blemish. We bring what we have. We do not all contribute in the same kind. The greatest contributors may be those who seem to contribute nothing. Even in the matter of giving of our wealth, Jesus Christ has a law of measurement. He said, concerning one

who gave two mites, which make one farthing, "She hath given more than them all." Some contribute thought, inspiration, personal magnetism; some communicate the contagion of enthusiasm; some give new ideas concerning the old truths, or set old truths in new lights and aspects; some give of the herd, some of the flock, and some of the aviary; some but two mites. What is it gives the value to the offering? The spirit. The primest bullock that ever browsed is a worthless offering, if it be given with begrudgement or reluctance; and the poorest effort in speech, in service, in prayer, in oblation, is a miracle, if done with the passion of the heart.

NOTE.

If a man were rich and could afford it, he would bring his burnt sacrifice, with which he designed to honour God, out of his herd of larger cattle. He who considers what God is will resolve to give him the best he has; else he gives him not the glory due unto his name. . . Those of the middle rank, who could not well afford to offer a bullock, would bring a sheep or a goat, and those who were not able to do that would be accepted of God if they brought a turtle-dove or a pigeon. It is observable that those creatures were chosen for sacrifice which were most mild and gentle, harmless and inoffensive; to typify the innocence and meekness that were in Christ, and to teach the innocence and meekness that should be in Christians.

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The Jews say this sacrifice of birds was one of the most difficult services the priests had to do. The priest would need to take as much care in offering this sacrifice as in any of the others; to teach those that minister in holy things to be as solicitous for the salvation of the souls of the poor as of the rich; their services are as acceptable to God, if they come from an upright heart, as the services of the rich; for he expects according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not (2 Cor. viii. 12). The poor man's turtle-doves or young pigeons are here said to be an offering of a sweet savour, as much as those of an ox or a bullock, that hath horns and hoofs. Yet, to love God with all our heart, and to love our neighbours as ourselves, is better than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices (Mark xii. 33).—*Commentary*, HENRY AND SCOTT.

Leviticus i. (continued).

THE ORDER OF THE ANCIENT OFFERINGS.

THERE is something very remarkable in the order in which the offerings, patriarchal and Jewish, were presented unto the Lord. I do not advise young readers to make themselves learnedly familiar with patriarchal and Jewish usage or ritual, but I do recommend them to look sufficiently into the old histories to make themselves acquainted with the elements that are permanent, and which throw light upon a development which was consummated in the cross and in the whole priesthood of Jesus Christ. The order of offering itself is a revelation. I do not go beyond that order to find proof that the book which sets it forth in historical sequence is a book inspired. The order in which the offerings were presented enables me to address every man as religious. It is a large sanctuary that throws out its sacred screen until it includes the man who is supposed not to be in church at all. God builds no little houses. He is not given to making small, dwarfed sanctuaries that can hold but a few. He means his Church to be typified by the blue sky when there is no cloud or fog in it, when it is at its very best in all the infinitude of its summer glory. It is then the blue dome best emblematises the Church and Kingdom of him who is all heart when he loves and all light when he guides.

I would that I could sufficiently prepare your minds, if they have not already undergone adequate preparation, for the statement of the order in which the offerings occurred. I could announce them at once. I do not want to throw the announcement away. I want to dally with you until I get you into the true tone and temper of mind for a revelation so brilliant and startling. I want to lead you away from commerce and anxiety, to excite you to a pitch of expectation, so that you may realise the infinite grandeur of the development.

The first offering that was presented in patriarchal ages was the burnt-offering. It was an appeal to fire. It did not mean destruction. The meaning of the burnt-offering was that which ascends. Think of it; that man first directed his attention to fire as a medium of worship. The flesh was not regarded as destroyed by burning, but as being sent up to God as a sweet-smelling savour. It was a typical offering of the hope of the whole life of the man who offered the sacrifice. Being put into modern language it meant, "I am God's creature; my life is his; I give it to him; on the wings of fire my life ascends to his holy place, and daily I rise to the source of my being." All religious acts mean more than they seem to mean. No religious act is measurable by words. It is not to be brought within a parenthesis, and yarded off into so many inches or ells; therefore it is more than probable that those who offered the burnt-offering had some deep conceptions of a moral kind. But these do not appear in the act; they are latent; they are hidden and stowed away in the consciousness of the worshipper who is dumb because of the vastness of the work he has undertaken. But the elementary meaning is ascending, returning as fire to the sun, for your fire in your little grate is a child of the sun, and when it flickers and spurts and crackles and blazes, what is it doing but seeking its source? Find Abel and find Noah, and others of patriarchal times, lighting their fire and offering their burnt-offering, and you find the very first principle of natural religion. That burnt-offering might represent the operation of an instinct. Man is spoken of as a religious being. He goes out after the unknown God, and you cannot keep him back. He will make a God rather than not have one. He aspires, he ascends; earth is too little for him, time chokes him. He is almost God, even as fire in its blaze and glow and heaven-seeking flame is almost a human spirit at times. It burns for God, it seeks him fervently.

The patriarchal burnt-offering represented the indestructible God-seeking element in human nature. In that sense the fire upon the altar never goes out. There are men amongst us to-day who are not in the Church, and who have no hymn-book and no pastor, and no *locus standi* in ecclesiastical courts, who are presenting the burnt-offering. They stand with Abel, they

worship with Noah; they are in the twilight far back, but they are still within God's great day of worship and grace and hope. The burnt-offering is the expression of an instinct. Now these men have dropped the word *God*. Perhaps they do not like it; perhaps the associations which have gathered round it have somewhat discouraged, or even distressed, them; perhaps they have been troubled by sectarian definitions of that infinite term, and by endeavours to house the Eternal within bricks of a merely denominational boundary, but they offer the burnt sacrifice to the Secret, the Force, the Totality of Being, the Something beyond, the *plus*, whatever it is. When they lift their necks and sigh because they have no speech, they are offering the burnt sacrifice; they are going up in pure flame to the Unmeasured and the Unnamed. Do I drive such men away as heathen, pagan, and alien? God forbid. I would they could offer at another altar which I shall presently name; meanwhile, if they sigh, they will be saved; if they want to know, they shall know; if they are offering the fire of an earnest and fervent wish, that fire will be accepted in its fullest meaning. Yet I would speak these words cautiously, and with distinct reservation, because, as a Christian teacher, I have to enforce Christian truth. I am speaking of men now who are sincere, real-hearted, simple-minded, without disingenuousness or complexity of thought, but who have come up to a point unknown, a secret unnameable, an uncontrollable force, and who worship by lifting silent eyes, or sighing out their wondering hearts, after that which they have not yet understood. The Lord accept their fire, and make their hearts warm with ever-growing desire after himself.

What was the next offering presented in patriarchal times and under the Jewish ritual? It was the peace-offering. The peace-offering had a double aspect. It was heaved, the action being the uplifted hand, ejaculated, thrown up, to the enthroned God, and there was a secondary action, lateral, waving, having great human meanings, pathetic outgoings towards human moods, human obligations, social trespasses and sins. Certain portions of the victim were offered upon the altar in burning, and the remainder of the flesh was eaten by the man who offered the sacrifice, and those who were associated with him. In heathen sacrifices the portion that was not burnt was saved to furnish materials for a feast.

There are some persons who do not understand eating and drinking. They are merely animal exercises to them. They do not like toasts; they disapprove them; and they are perfectly right under their narrow definitions. But to eat should be a religious exercise; the lifting of a hand over a table of feast should mean, "God be with us, every one; God forgive our sins and bind us in tenderer love." Let us learn from the old heathen nations, when they had burnt part of the offering to the gods, they kept the other for a social feast, that eating and drinking are sacramental acts when performed by religious souls—they *may* be acts that can be done in stable or sty, they may be made sacraments unto God.

The peace-offering had therefore a divine uplifting and a human outlook and application. At times the innate brotherhood of the race declares itself in bursts of benevolence. We have to be at peace with one another. What is the meaning of apologising, pardon-seeking, mutual explanation, agreeing with the adversary quickly whilst he is in the way with us? What is the meaning of going to one another, and saying, "Brother, I have sinned against you; I have done you wrong"? That is the permanent element in the old patriarchal, Jewish, and pagan peace-offering. So, then, up to this point we are under the operation of what I may term religious instinct. Heathen nations have found out the things I have now been speaking about—fire seeking, tremblingly, a source, with a modesty that makes it quiver, with an energy that cannot be turned aside; and a peace-offering, meaning, "I have injured you, we have injured one another, we have done to one another the things we ought not to have done; we apologise, we repent, we express contrition; we have a wave-offering; let us all accept it, and be at peace among ourselves."

The burnt-offering, the peace-offering—what next? The SIN-offering! It is a beautiful development. The sin-offering comes under law and is full of mystery. Unlike the burnt-offering and the peace-offering, it is not wholly measurable by an instinct. It roots itself in an instinct, but goes beyond it. The sin-offering is a revelation: not in patriarchal annals but in Mosaic records we read how the blood shed in sacrifice was to be treated. Now we come to *blood*. Where do you first read of the blood,

in this relation? You should make yourselves, younger readers, familiar with the beginnings of great rivers; you should explore these Niles of thought. We read of blood in this relation for the first time in the twelfth chapter of Exodus, which treats of the sprinkling of the blood of the lamb on the door-posts of the houses of the Israelites. It was to save them from destruction. The next mention of blood is in the twenty-fourth chapter of Exodus. This should be specially noticed. Blood was now to be used in common with burnt-offerings and peace-offerings of the covenant of Sinai. Thus all that was instinctive was taken up into the region of revelation, and was baptized with blood. The burnt-offering and the peace-offering were no longer instinctive ceremonies, they were baptized with the red blood and made holy unto the Lord as offerings that expressed his revealed will.

When the sin-offering was presented, a portion of blood was offered to the Lord by being put on the horns of the altar, and the rest, except on certain occasions, was poured away at the base of the altar. The blood was the life: to offer the blood was typically to die: in emblem the sinner slew himself. Now look at the development—the burnt-offering, consecration; the peace-offering, the humanity of religion; the sin-offering, atonement, sacrifice, propitiation—words not to be caught within a theory, and to be seen only once in a lifetime. Distrust those who have theories of the atonement. You can only see the atonement for a moment. Christ could only suffer his agony once. Such agonies are not to be repeated. You do not see the atonement with a cold reason: you cannot analyse it and then synthesise and play theologico-metaphysical tricks and games with the heart of God. Once your eyes will be opened you will see it—see the Cross, see the bursting heart, and you will be saved. God's Christianity is a religion of fire. Only under the excitement of the soul, which amounts to a divine inspiration, an opening of the eyes by God himself, can we see the Cross. I once saw it: it abides within me as the sun abides: after you have seen it for a moment with the open eye, close the eye and the sun is still there. It is in you. As to reasoning about it, and logically persuading a man that God died for him—logic and God are never brought together in this con-

nection ; it is an unholy union ; see the Sin and you will see the Mercy !

Through some such process must we all come. You are offering the burnt sacrifice ; I thank God, I hail you as a brother. You are offering peace sacrifices, you want good will amongst men, peace on earth, happy family relationships—you want to diffuse the spirit of brotherhood. Thank God ; you are not far from the kingdom. Only get a man out of himself to think about anybody else in the world, and he is on the road to God. Now that is not enough : the sin-offering takes up the preliminary sacrifices, gives them their true meaning, their highest application, and extracts from them all that is permanent and valuable in their purpose. We have not come to the mount that might be touched, to Mount Sinai ; we have not come to the Jewish shambles, red with blood, reeking with outpoured life—we have come to Calvary, to the slain Man, to the Lamb of God—a great mystery, but I wanted it to round off my thinking, I wanted it as a sky to my earth—I had made a little mud floor which I called earth, I wanted that higher floor to set above it like a sky, rich with one sun, wealthy with innumerable stars.

Where are you ? Still following your instinct ? I call you to obey a revelation. Still occupying yourself with human relationships ? I call upon you to see the divine meaning and purpose. Where are you—at the Cross ? Stay there. With Jesus ? Never leave him. With the blood that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel ? Long for no higher eloquence. Then is my life to be spent in sighing at the Cross ? No. How ? On the Cross. We are to be crucified with Christ, we are to know the fellowship of his sufferings, we are to be living sacrifices. The Lord drive back those baptized in grace who are making a luxury of Christianity, a pillow of down of Christian revelation—the Lord send them back to the burnt-offering and the peace-offering, for they have mistaken the genius of the last revelation. If our Christian religion is not a passion, it is a lie. The old doctors of the Church said that if Christ was not God, he was not good. “ *Non Deus, non bonus.* ” If we are not alive with fire we are twice dead—we shall be plucked up by the roots.

And as for thee, earnest man, all flame, know the spirit of judgment is to be united with the spirit of burning, that zeal is to be balanced by knowledge, that the true logic is love, not reason, directed by all the highest powers of the mind. Thou shalt love with all thy *mind*. Intellect itself is to be a flame, cold understanding is to be warmed up into a burning affection. These are great mysteries, but the elect of God will understand them.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, all things do change, but thou changest not: thou art the same, and thy years do not fail. The heavens grow old, and the earth, and all things made by thine almightiness; but thou remainest upon the throne from age to age, ruling, governing, redeeming, and blessing the sons of men. Thou wilt reign evermore: the Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice. Jesus Christ thy Son shall reign till all enemies are put under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death: death shall be swallowed up in victory; then shall there be a shouting of great gladness in thine house, because there shall be no more death. Thou art taking away one and another, still thy Church abides; speech after speech ends and is forgotten, but the word of the Lord abideth for ever. We bless thee for that which is permanent amidst that which is always passing away. Thou thyself art the Living One: the generations come and go, but the Creator sits upon the throne time without end. May we be found worshippers of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, adoring the Father, loving and serving the Son, and receiving constantly the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Ghost, until we become temples of the triune God, and body, soul, and spirit—all, is without flaw, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,—glorious with the splendour and beautiful with the comeliness of Christ. The Lord light a fire in the midst of us that shall not consume; the Lord address a gospel to every heart that shall call it to its noblest hopes and consecrate it to divinest service. Reordain all thy ministers every day; baptize thy people with a double portion of thy Spirit morning by morning; regard the lambs of the flock with shepherdly tenderness; may all workers work with both hands, and may all sufferers magnify the patience of Christ. Amen.

Leviticus ii. 12-16.

12. As for the oblation of the firstfruits, ye shall offer them unto the Lord : but they shall not be burnt on the altar for a sweet savour.

13. And every oblation of thy meat-offering shalt thou season with salt ; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat-offering : with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.

14. And if thou offer a meat-offering of thy firstfruits unto the Lord, thou shalt offer for the meat-offering of thy firstfruits green ears of corn dried by the fire, even corn beaten out of full ears.

15. And thou shalt put oil upon it, and lay frankincense thereon : it is a meat-offering.

16. And the priest shall burn the memorial of it, part of the beaten corn thereof, and part of the oil thereof, with all the frankincense thereof : it is an offering made by fire unto the Lord.

THE MEAT-OFFERING.

WE have been accustomed to the terms "burnt-offering," "offering of the flocks," "offering of the fowls," "the burnt sacrifice," "an offering made by fire of sweet savour unto the Lord,"—now we read of a "meat-offering." Is there, then, already in these ancient writings some hint of appropriation, participation in a sacred feast ? The other offerings stand outside of us ; we do not know all the meaning of the mysterious flame ; it is something done by us under the inspiration and direction of God. But is the "meat-offering" a hint of something that is done within us for our spiritual nourishment, for the daily culture of the soul in all its best qualities and moods ? Is it a solitary feast ? or, being solitary at a given historical point, is it suggestive of communion, fellowship, participation with others—yea, with the Master himself in festal blessing ? We have become weary with the burnt-offerings, with slaughters and blood-shedding ; but the "meat-offering" seems to hint at eucharistic hospitality,—the appropriation of the body and the blood of Christ in a great symbolic act whose majesty is shaded by its tenderness. We are not yielding to fancy in any wanton or lawless sense in thus

finding the germs and beginnings of things. Even the Church has its Genesis; even the Bible has its first book—its seed-house; and blessed are they, as men who are very wealthy in spiritual possessions, who can wisely, and rationally, and truly seize the very plasm out of which all the Church-universe has been developed and consolidated.

The "meat-offering" was to be seasoned with salt. It is wonderful to mark how God in his providence attaches his kingdom to old customs or prevalent practices, or to usages that had great meanings to the common people, so that through them as through parabolical images he might communicate his own highest purposes and meanings. This is what Christianity always does. In going into the nations it studies the customs of the people; it aims very quickly to preach in the native tongue. It does not stand up in its ancient pride and classical elegance and say to other nations, even to peoples who have no grammar or formal speech, "You must learn my tongue." It says, "What is your speech? How do you hold commerce with one another? Show me your methods of communicating with one another as to spiritual impression, or purpose, or action that has a meaning and a design, and I will adopt your plans, methods, customs and usages, for through them, better than through any other medium, I can communicate my purpose to you." Christianity is the condescending religion; Christianity is the religion that can afford to stoop; there is majesty in its every attitude. Its Founder made himself of no reputation, but took upon himself the form of a slave that he might raise and save the world. There was an ancient Eastern custom as to the use of salt and the meaning of salt as used upon various occasions. There have been countries in which the eating of salt with a man meant eternal friendship. Said one, "I cannot fight with him"—naming a supposed enemy—"because we have eaten salt together." A custom among the Arabs was, in the forming of any serious covenant, to sprinkle salt upon a sword, and for the two covenanting parties to partake of the salt so sprinkled, and the understanding was that nothing should ever be allowed to violate that covenant. It was a covenant seasoned with salt, sealed by the most solemn formalities. Arabs, who can trifle with language, who have a subtlety of mind that can make dis-

tinctions where other intelligences fail to perceive any differences, would hold themselves bound by a common participation of salt sprinkled upon a sword never to violate the awful covenant. The Lord adopts our customs wherein they are to us most significant. He begins with the human mind where he can. Instead of formulating some new method unheard of and open to all the perils of controversial interpretation, he says, in effect,—“What are your most solemn usages?” Finding them to be in themselves innocent, involving no corruptness or malice, he adopts such usages as points of beginning—just as he would invent a parable whereby to express a kingdom. There is a great law here which we ought to study more carefully and apply more fearlessly. Christianity consents to be, in a sense, nationalised—accentuated by the peculiarities of the people who receive it. It cannot be otherwise. It is so amongst ourselves. Every man seasons his sacrifice according to his individuality,—in other words, marks his labour by his own image and superscription, so that it is *his* labour expressively and exclusively; it bears upon it the touch of his own soul. When India receives the Christian revelation we shall have Indian preaching, Indian books: the old truths, which never can be changed in substance, expressed in new eloquence, startling allegory, wondrous philosophy: words will be turned to new uses and miracles will be wrought in the speech of men. So with every other nation. Each will have its own form of Christianity, its own method of representing the Gospel, its own condiment with which to season its most religious actions. Let us be more fearless herein. Let us recognise the diversity of human qualities, capacities, and general gifts. We must not mechanise the divine kingdom or the eternal book. Where can each man attach himself to this redeeming thought? should be the supreme question of the Church. The true Church includes all churches. They may not all stand upon one level, but they are all shone upon by the same impartial Sun, all grouped in the same infinite constellation which constitutes the crown of Christ. Can you seize the Christian thought best at the humanity of Christ? then seize it there and despise the theological odium that may be heaped upon you by theological bigots. Can you, on the other hand, at once, as if by some spiritual kinship,

enter into the very highest mysteries of the Divine Nature? Then begin even there—away among the upper places radiant with celestial splendour—and heed not the imputations of fanaticism which may be accorded to you by theological utilitarians. Do you need some other point of attachment? and have you found one of your own? Have you found it?—keep it, it is yours by right of spiritual revelation, or mental conquest, wrought in you as a miracle by God the Holy Ghost. The one thing to be observed is this: that the central truth may be the same—must be the same; Christ cannot change, his priesthood cannot be altered; but recognise the sublime possibility that by a thousand different ways of merely particular thinking and seizure of principles we may all at last come into a common light and hail one another in a communion to which we have passed through all the tumult of sometimes angry controversy.

Here is the element of discipline even in worship. We have not been accustomed to associate worship and discipline, but the two cannot be properly or justly—that is, in harmony with the genius of the divine purpose—dissociated. Worship is discipline; discipline in its highest sense is worship. Is God careless about the way in which he is worshipped, or approached, or sought unto? Already in these ancient writings we find that it is God himself who marks the road, keeps the gate, gives the password, indicates times, seasons, gifts, quantities methods. There is no human invention in all this poetry of worship, nor is there laxity. No man is left to himself to invent his own religion, to build his own little altar, and to have everything according to his own way of thinking. This is the marvellous apparent contradiction of the divine testimony—individuality, but under divine inspiration; divine inspiration accommodating itself to national circumstances and to individual capacities, but all the time preserving a central and unchangeable substance. This cannot always be explained in words. We must live some expositions. We must pray ourselves, and through much suffering introduce ourselves, into some of the many provinces of the heavenly kingdom. Even where God adopts a national habit, or an individual capacity and accent, he adopts whatever he takes in hand so as to bring it under continual and most

holy discipline. Pray in your own time, but pray at the appointed altar ; bring your offering willingly, but having brought it willingly offer it according to the standard and law of the sanctuary. We must not be lax in our worship. Voluntariness, consent and assent of the mind must not be understood as permitting new ventures, out-of-the-way customs, the very establishment of which conceals a tribute to our own vanity. In the kingdom of Christ there is the largest liberty for individual thought, capacity, expression, and yet there is a centripetal force that binds all diversities to its own great heart. Unity in diversity,—diversity forming itself into unity,—these are the practical mysteries ; but, blessed be God, these are also the daily revelations of the highest spiritual life and relation. Herein we have been unjust to the gracious spirit of Christianity : we have come to church when we pleased, we have listened to Gospel ministration when we were disposed to do so, we have given the offering in any way that best suited the convenience of the moment, we have entered the house of God when our circumstances suggested we should do so,—we have entered it perfunctorily, we have left it hastily, we have scampered through its exercises as through something that must unhappily be done ;—all this has but whitened the sepulchre, has but aggravated the blasphemy which it seemed to conceal. Let no man think that he can alter God's waiting : or set back the ordinances of Heaven : that he can come into the book just where he pleases, how he pleases, and extract from it the message which God left there only for humble souls and broken hearts. There is a discipline of worship. There is a law that watches the altar—a flaming sword moving every way that keeps the tree of Life. We must not debase the name of liberty by reducing its permissions into the extravagances of licentiousness. Discipline in every part of life must be our law ; in our uprising and our downsitteing, in all we think, say, do, the whole life must have upon it the touch, the superintendence, criticism, and sacred intention of spiritual meaning.

Whatever of frankincense, or leaven, or oil, we may bring with the offering, if it be a meat-offering we must not forget the salt. Leaven and oil represent possible fermentation, corruption and depreciation of quality salt represents that which is antiseptic

preservative, vital, permanent. The salt may not be required in some offerings, but it is required in one, and that offering the "meat-offering," the participation-offering, the festival-service. There must be some seal with divine meanings in it. Perhaps we may be left in some sense to adopt our own particular seal; but the seal must be there—the vital signature. Your letter means nothing until you have signed it; it is no letter addressed even to the eye, much less to the heart, until it bears the signature of the hand that wrote it and the man that meant it all. Your blessing upon your food may be very brief, but it is a blessing; before eating your bread you may but look up silently unto heaven, but there is a silence that is an infinite prayer. You must for yourself determine in many instances what the seal is to be—whether salt, or an upward look, or a sigh, the confession of unworthiness, or some gentle family hymn sung by the father and the mother and all the children. Fix your own seal. It may be unknown by any other person or family in the whole Church, but it is yours; and in some things God has been pleased to allow us this gracious liberty, this license of spiritual invention, but without the seal which to you has the greatest meaning what you do may be worthless. The one great seal never can be changed, and that is the name of Christ, the priesthood of the Son of God, the ever-speaking blood,—that admits of no variation, or modification, or re-arrangement; it abides for ever. But there are other seals, tokens and intimations, in the use of which we may have much liberty. Your worship may be right as to its form; but it may be offered in a wrong spirit. A man may pray blasphemously; a man may pray profanely. There are prayers that are profanity in its worst form. When you use the altar as a place of judgment upon others—when you pray so as to inflict pain upon those who are supposed to share your intercession—when under the shelter of talking to God you talk bitterly to men of their offences, and shortcomings, and evil deeds—the worship in its act and in some of its general meanings may be right, but being uttered in a wrong spirit it falls downward. Thank God he has a bottomless pit for our pithless, soulless, Christless prayers! You may give the right gift of time, or money, or influence—be it what it may, but being unsalted with your heart's consent, it is not accepted in the treasury of heaven;

it does not amount to a practical and accepted contribution ; a voice says, "Thy money perish with thee : both of you rot together or be eaten up by a common canker." You have the right creed, but if it be unaccompanied by sacrifice it is no faith, it is without the salt of real, genuine trust ; it is a form of godliness but without the power thereof. This is the position about which we should be most anxiously jealous. It has become so common to think that a creed merely as such—an enumerated and regulated act of beliefs—can save the world. All these we may need, every one of them may be of great importance ; but until our creed becomes our faith, until it is taken into the heart and reproduced in the life by loving sacrifice, daily seasoned with salt, continually ablaze to the heavens, it is a creed only which a parrot might repeat—not an inspiration which an angel might covet. Hence we come to have mechanical orthodoxies, hence we add to the profanity of a lifetime the audacity which can sentence men to the right hand or to the left in proportion as they read our books and adopt our lines and our formal positions. Blessed be God ! our Maker is our Judge. He looks at the spirit. "To this man will I look." "To which man, Lord ?" "The man who is of a broken and a contrite heart and who trembleth at my word." Where has that man ever been regarded as a Christian ? Where is his name set down at the top of any human list ? Nowhere ; and that confession must be followed by a thanksgiving. You may be on the right side of an argument, but if your position be unsalted by enthusiasm your patronage is a burden. You count one by the register, but you are not counted at all by the God of the battle. A right man, a right side, without a right spirit ; on the right nominal list without being inflamed by Heaven's pure fire,—that is falsehood, that is irony, that keeps back the kingdom of heaven from its proper advance to-day. Let the cold man leave the Church ; we shall be the warmer for that subtraction of coldness. Do not let the formalist patronise the Cross ; he hurts us, he hurts the cause, he hurts the Son of God. Take your patronage over to the other side : you grieve the Spirit of God ! The offering is nominally right, the contribution is formally to all appearance as it ought to be ; but the soul is wanting,—the fire, the enthusiasm, the love, the passion,—the one thing that gives it significance and value.

Leviticus iii.

MINOR OFFERINGS.

IN addition to the great offerings of the Jewish ritual, there were certain minor offerings for which special provision was made. If we take this chapter and view it in the light of the Christian dispensation we shall see more clearly what has been gained by the Christian covenant. These offerings, in themselves considered, the Gentile mind will never be able fully to appreciate. The oblations were not intended for Gentiles, and therefore can only be understood in some of their broadest suggestions by the contrasts which are afforded by the Christian religion. We cannot but be struck by the fact that the penalties of worship, as expressed by all these offerings, are abolished. That the Jewish worship was a system of penalties is evident upon the face of the arrangements. The gifts were really substantial and costly; whatever there might be about them of mere sentiment and spiritual aspiration it is certain that the gifts themselves necessitated very heavy expenditure, and constituted in fact a species of personal taxation. The meaning of this is that sin wherever it is found necessitates punishment. The punishment of sin is in no wise suspended or abrogated by the Christian dispensation, but the sting of penalty is wholly abstracted from Christian worship by the very spirit of Christ. What is now given, even of a costly character, ceases to affect the mind with a sense of its burdensomeness and becomes rather a delight than an imposition, a response of the heart rather than a heavy toil of the reluctant hand. Throughout the Biblical revelation we are never allowed to lose sight of the fact that sin means suffering, and that in some way or other sin must be paid for—not in equivalents but in punishments, which are continually showing themselves unequal to the disastrous occasion. Payment on account of sin is the law of nature. We must not lose sight of

this idea simply because there is no money in the transaction,—ailment, decrepitude, incapacity to enjoy and inability to respond to the claims of life, all manner of restlessness, fear and shame,—these are among the heavy payments which sin exacts at the hands of the sinner. It is difficult, too, to rid the mind of the idea that something like payment is involved in the act of worship; by payment in this sense must be understood the idea of compensation or doing something for the sake of blotting something else out, and thus, as it were, balancing accounts with Heaven. The Christian spirit delivers the soul from all this sense of mechanism and burdensomeness; though the worship is due and though the homage is paid, and thus words are imported into the exercise which savour of a commercial kind, yet what is due is rather an expression of spontaneous love, and what is paid is rather the inspiration of a grateful heart than any action that can be brought under the name of imposition or taxation.

It is impossible to compare this chapter with the law of Christian worship without observing how all narrow conceptions of God and of his requirements of the human soul are utterly abolished. The Jewish system was really a small one in all its conceptions of God. Jehovah was a task-master, a king who had prizes to give away and appointments to make in his celestial kingdom. He was an image of terror and of continual apprehension; his anger was to be appeased by suffering on the part of those who had offended, or by the offering of symbolic sacrifices. The day's account could be settled within the day itself. The service was the labour of a hireling and not the sacred answer of the heart to the claim of divine love. All this is done away in the Christian dispensation. The idea of master, despot, ruler, in the low and base senses of these terms, has no place in Christian thinking. God is Father, pitiful and kind; Lord, as gracious as he is mighty; the Eternal who is continually incarnating himself in the separate moments of time. Worship is no longer confined to definite places as if it would be unacceptable unless offered under localising and narrowing conditions. Not in any mountain, nor in any metropolis exclusively is worship to be offered; the whole earth is now a church and every man is related to the priesthood of the Son of God. With those narrow conceptions all degrading thoughts of God are

abolished. God is degraded to human thought when he is conceived of as a tyrant or as one who comes to claim mere suffering at the hands of the sinner. We are led to see that suffering is only intended as a means towards spiritual education, and is only used because through it alone can some parts of our nature be vitally and redeemingly touched. The suffering thus acquires a new character because it is invested with a new purpose. It is not suffering only, or suffering without moral suggestion and comfort; it is suffering as an educator, as a severity edged with mercy, as a mere point in a long and tedious process by which the soul is delivered from evil servitude and brought into sacred and holy liberty. Along with narrow conceptions and degrading thoughts of God all merely bodily exercises are done away. "Bodily exercise profiteth little." Long education was required to expel from the human mind the sophism that bodily exercise is needful to spiritual enlargement. Being in the body we use to a larger extent than is often supposed, the creatures of the flesh. It pleases us to think that we are able to do something or to suffer something which must of necessity have an effect upon the obligation created by our daily guilt. The ministrations which we offer to our vanity are often of the subtlest kind. Even in our Christian worship there is a tendency of the mind towards all that is meant by "bodily exercise": it may be by much speaking, it may be by overstraining the mind in an effort to be mechanically correct, it may be some superstitious idea of what is due to the majesty of God, it may be many things which cannot be named in words; but in the last analysis it will be found that the offering of bodily exercise conceals itself oftentimes within our most sacred spiritual abstractions and services. That Christianity seeks to deliver the soul from all such bondage, is one of its highest titles to the trust and veneration of men. Christianity risks itself upon its absolute spirituality. It is willing to part with all its externals in order that it may establish itself in the simple and unadulterated confidence of the heart. It has gone so far as to be willing to lay aside miracles, and prophecies, and tongues, and all signs and wonders—considering these but as so many bodily exercises—in order that it might set up a kingdom of spiritual truth and establish a service of spiritual consecration. Christianity has

even gone so far as to say in the person of its greatest expounder, the Apostle Paul, that henceforth even Christ himself is not known after the flesh. What has become of the body of Christ is now a small question compared with what is the meaning of the rule of the Spirit of Christ in every province of human thought and life. Great lessons follow from this train of reflection. We must put a stop to all those inferior teachers who would enclose the kingdom of heaven within certain questions of simply a fleshly kind, though those questions may never be defined under such broad conditions. We may debase even the question of inspiration into a merely carnal one; that is to say, we may be so anxious about the inspiration of certain particular individuals, as to where that inspiration began and ended and how it operated, as utterly to overlook the true nature and function of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the human heart. It is possible to be so anxious to prove the actual rising of the body of Christ from the grave as to forget the higher resurrection, the nobler and grander ascension, the direct personal lordship of Christ over all things in heaven and in earth. There is no occasion so to pervert these suggestions as to deduce the mischievous inference that things introductory, accessory and explanatory, have been denied. Nothing of the kind. Our one object is to define the limit of such externals and illustrations, and to show that they all point towards an inner and inexpressible mystery: the kingdom of heaven in the heart—often without defined boundaries, but embracing all inspiration, conviction, service and hope; involving, in fact, the whole being in the very mystery of immortality and heaven. These reflections have a distinct bearing upon persons who would offer sacrifice or homage with the mere letter of Scripture. It cannot be too persistently re-affirmed that it is possible to know the letter and yet not to know anything of the meaning of the spirit; to be learned in chapter and verse and to be completely qualified for cross-examination in the concordance, and yet never to have come within the sacred enclosure of spiritual revelation and ministry. The letter is true; the letter must be vindicated; but the letter itself is dishonoured when it is considered as final;—it is a magnificent portal to a magnificent palace or temple.

Leviticus iv. 3.

"If the priest that is anointed do sin."

POSSIBILITIES OF GUILT.

BUT that is impossible! Yet how graciously the matter is suggested! What a wondrous providence is revealed in mitigations,—remote, gracious suggestions and definitions. What wonderful *ifs* in the speech of God!—as if his great heart were glad of some word that merely hinted at an impossible possibility, at something which might occur but could not; a voice such as was heard in Eden when the suggestion was made concerning a certain tree. It never could have entered into the divine thought that any accountable and loving creature would touch a tree that had been forbidden. But in this case we read of an officer—a priest—a priest anointed, so that there can be no mistake about his identity. The descriptive clause is perfect and complete in simplicity. Yet how wondrous a thing in all the wondrousness of love is this door that opens the verse,—this great astounding *If*! How can a priest sin? The oil is upon him; the holy touch has left its holy impress upon him. Great names should be equal in moral arithmetic to great characters. Great offices are not empty forms, mere sounding words, titles to live upon. Great names are great offices, and great offices imply great character: for character alone is strength in the sanctuary,—not brilliance, not genius, not power of amazing other intellects by lights that look like revelations; but solid, genuine, noble character,—indiscretions may lie upon it a thousand thick, but right down in the core of it there is genuine sincerity, unuttered and unutterable desire for God. That is what character really is and always ought to be and must be. No man can do the Church so much harm as the priest, the professor, the minister, the person who is

inside the Church. We sometimes talk about *unbelievers*. Where are they? How seldom we realise the fact that a man cannot be an *unbeliever* outside! The unbelievers are inside. Do you see that? Do you feel that? Only he can *unbelieve* who has professed to *believe*. There is a merely etymological sense in which a man who is outside may be an unbeliever; but in the deep, moral, tragical sense of the term the unbelievers are in the pulpit and in the pew. The unbelievers are not the men who to-day are lecturing against God and Christ and Revelation: the unbelievers are the anointed priests who have slipped out of the enthusiasm of their piety, who are uttering formal sentences without having a corresponding burning in the heart, who are living upon paper which is unsupported by the solid bullion. This is the truth now urging itself upon us every one, because it is so easy to deceive one's self and talk about unbelievers, as if they were the persons who never went to church, who took no part in religious movements, and who rather turned a deaf ear to all religious appeals. *They* cannot *unbelieve*,—*we* can; the priest that is anointed can; the Christian that is baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost can. The man who sings religious hymns and folds his hands and closes his eyes in religious attitude can *unbelieve*. Judgment must begin at the house of God. Do not suppose that we are Christians because we are theologians, or that we know anything about divine pity because we are skilled in the controversy of words. Christianity is a state of the heart, a condition of the soul before God, a continual penitence, a continual faith, a continual service. Change your views, if you please, about persons who are called unbelievers. There is no greater unbeliever than the man who preaches a Gospel he does not feel; there is no greater unbeliever than the Church which having a form of godliness denies the power thereof. This thought would close many a ministry, would shut up many a mission to the outsiders called unbelievers; this would burn us, yet by the grace and mercy of God would make new men of us. The world will die and mock the efforts of the Church unless the Church itself shall take up its old faith and live in its rightful and natural force. Still there is some comfort

in this subjunctive form and way of putting the case. "If the priest that is anointed do sin,"—if professing men do fall below their profession; if Christian aspirants fall below the level of their own prayer,—if venerable men should turn aside for one moment to dally with the foe,—if—if—; it is God's *if*. It is the way of mercy. Search into every command of God, and you will find mercy at the heart of it.

Read on: "If the whole congregation of Israel sin." Can a whole congregation sin? Yes. We must not individualise too much. Humanity is not a set of unrelated individuals: humanity is a larger term than the one word "individual," or "man," or "person." It is easy for a whole congregation to sin and for each man in that congregation to declare that he is not responsible for the sin of the whole. But he is. If that man has not stood up in the middle of the church, and cried out in a tone of agony against the evil that is being done, he is guilty of every sin which the Almighty charges upon the congregation as a whole. Men may be cowards in congregations who are brave men in their own individuality. Nothing tries a man's quality much more than making him a member of a crowd. Men will do things in crowds they would never dream of doing in their individual capacity and under their own sign-manual. Responsibility becomes diffused, the moral sense becomes scattered and distracted; and men, therefore, will do in committees, on boards, in congregations, in vestries, in churches what they would not do in their own simple, measurable personality. Wondrous is the insight into human nature in such an *if* as we have in the thirteenth verse. "If the whole congregation sin." There is a corporate life as well as a personal existence. We live in many relations towards one another and towards God. We are individuals,—we are also families, we are also citizens, we are also members of a congregation. We cannot tell where our relations cease,—how they shrink into comparatively small dimensions and then broaden out into imperial magnitudes. Life is a mystery involved in great complexity, and revealing itself very startlingly to every careful student of its expression and action. We cannot come together as a congregation without having con-

gregational relations to God. Could we teach this truth as it ought to be taught we should all be new men. When we are sitting at boards of direction, when we are dividing with others the responsibility of corporate decisions we should not play the coward by hiding behind some bigger man than ourselves. The safety of every corporation, congregation, imperial or ecclesiastical body, is in the development of the individual conscience. The nation will never be right until the individual is right. How much mischief has been done by bodies of men! and yet not one member of the several bodies will accept the responsibility of the action or the issue. But every man in a congregation is responsible for the Church, for the treatment of all the institutions of the Church, for a response to every appeal of the Church. He cannot say "the congregation" has done this or that, except in so far as we fix the responsibility upon the individual members. And this tells on both sides. We hear of congregations doing wonderful things in the way of benevolence; but coming to analysis we find the whole has been done by some half-dozen men. The congregation has no right to assume in its sum total capacity the virtues and the sacrifices of half-a-dozen heroic souls.

Read again: "If any one of the common people sin." How searching is the criticism of God! "Common people" may sin as certainly as priests and rulers. We have left the congregation in its corporate capacity for one moment, and we are now dealing with—not the common people, but "*any one* of the common people." God will not have *any man* permitted to sin with impunity. He does not release a priest from the obligations which he imposes upon the common people, nor will he excuse the common people because they are not priests. We are all God's little ones. Every man is of importance to God. "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." The same rule applies to moral criticism or to spiritual investigation of conduct. We must not excuse ourselves on the ground that we belong to the commonalty, and therefore may do what we please. God's judgment, like God's commandment, is "exceeding broad."

Thus we have,—If a priest do sin,—If a ruler sin,—If the whole congregation sin,—If any one of the common people

sin. Is there any loophole in that circle? Perhaps there may be. You cannot anticipate Omniscience. We read in the very beginning of this chapter,—“If a soul shall sin.” Now there is no loophole. The very first line of the next chapter reads: “And if a soul sin.” Now how will you escape? You are not “priest,” nor “ruler,” nor part of a “congregation,” nor “one of the common people”; but can you disclaim the next title,—“soul”? “If a soul sin,”—yes, it is the soul that sins. That is a doctrine full of graciousness, but full of mystery, and requires to be stated with such delicacy of expression, as perhaps but really few can follow, in all its solemnity and significance. We have been unkind to the body, we have been mean to the body; we knew we had it for only a few years—just a handful of days—and we have abused it as we would abuse an unvalued dog. We have charged the body with everything. It is mean, it is false; it is the soul that sins. The body can never, as the younger son, go far from the soul. We sin when we sin with the consent of our whole nature,—when the soul likes the tree, when the soul loves the golden goblet full of poison, when the soul says, “Give me more! this is a hunger of immortality.” Poor body! what it has had to bear! The soul is a coward. There is no divinely-intended schism between the body and the soul, and we must not be permitted to ride off upon the miserable excuse that the flesh is weak. God leaves no ground upon which any man can stand, saying,—“He has not mentioned me; I am no priest, nor do I belong to the congregation, nor am I one of the common people; I am something else: I have not been named; I may sin seven days a week and do as I list.” Hear the word of the Lord: “If a soul shall sin”; and again: “If a soul sin”; and yet again, in the following chapter: “If a soul sin.” There is no escape. Let us be just to ourselves. God has been coming to the soul all the time; but He must be so critical and, as it were, analytical as not to leave any man, woman or child with the appearance of an excuse.

Look at the whole of these *If*s and mark their pathos and overlook not their divine courtesy,—as if by this time, in the world's history, we had wrought ourselves up so high in moral culture and solidity of character, as to make it a bare possibility that we might sin. This is the divine generosity; this is the divine

encouragement. There is a time when you change your tone towards your own child. When your son is eighteen years of age you change your tone a little ; you begin to assume his dignity, his moral pride and ambition. You would not suggest to him that he could now repeat his childish follies ; and you wisely make what statements of a cautionary kind you have to make with moderated expression, with the cunning graduation of tone which only love can inspire and sustain. "By this time," you say, "another tone will be needed," and you adopt that tone, and if the young soul knew the meaning of it, he would see more of your real love in that changed tone than in the first commandment given with so frank a simplicity, and with so direct an emphasis.

Then after all those hypothetical cases we find God devising ways of escape. The Book of Leviticus is full of doors opening back upon the Father's heart. "If the priest that is anointed do sin" tell him what to do,—how he shall bring his "young bullock without blemish," and how he shall bring it "unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord, and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head, and kill the bullock before the Lord," and "take of the bullock's blood" and "dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle the blood seven times before the Lord, before the rail of the sanctuary," and "put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord, which is in the tabernacle of the congregation ; and shall pour all the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering." Tell him what to do. The record might have gone in the contrary direction : "If a priest that is anointed do sin, report it to me, and all the tabernacles of thunder shall be shaken, and not one bolt of lightning hidden in all the treasury of heavens shall be spared ; the criminal shall be shot through and through with lightning and buried amid the indignation of angels !" No ; the Book of Leviticus shows the very genius of Deity in finding ways whereby offences may be sponged out and offenders made as if they had not fallen. But there is no trifling with sin. Read all the provisions made after each *if*, and you will find that repentance is always costly ; read the detail of the sacrifices, and you will find how exacting is God. A man cannot sin in an off-handed manner and God say, "Let

bygones be bygones, and begin again to-morrow as if life had had no yesterday." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. If the priest has sinned, he is not regarded as a priest, but as a sinner. So with every member of the sinning tribe, repentance is costly, return is marked by exactions of the most minute and critical kind. You cannot get back to God but through the medium of sacrifice, blood, propitiation, atonement.

Now what says the New Testament about priest, ruler, congregation, common people, soul?—"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." It is still the way of blood. Do not vulgarise that term; do not narrow your conceptions of it and try to make it some vulgar excuse for not accepting the awful term. Blood means life, reality, divine agony, an outpouring of the soul. Sin has not changed its character, nor can the method of sin's redemption be changed as to its highest expression and meaning. "Without shedding of blood is no remission." It is so between ourselves. If we understood the compact aright, all forgiveness expresses blood-shedding, or we may return to our old alienation. So the great Christian Gospel is heard amongst us this day, saying so solemnly, so sweetly, with all the trumpets of heaven, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Come priest, ruler, congregation, common people, every soul,—come, for there is yet room,—"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Leviticus iv.

SINS OF IGNORANCE.

THE expression, "If a soul shall sin through ignorance," opens a very wide region of thought. One would wonder whether it is possible that sin can be committed in ignorance—that is to say, whether the ignorance does not do away with the sinful character of the deed. Is not sin a wilful action? Is not its wilfulness the very essence of its guilt? So we would think; yet again and again in the ritual we find that ignorance is never made into a sufficient excuse for sin. The sense of mystery which we may feel in regard to this matter can only be relieved by looking for analogous instances in the field of nature. This I would lay down as an excellent law of Biblical interpretation. Thus, given instances of mystery which afflict the soul with a sense of burdensomeness, or even of injustice, to find out how far such circumstances are illuminated or explained by actions within the province of observation and reason take, for example, sins of ignorance in a strictly physical department of life. Suppose it to be possible for anyone not to know the nature of fire, and in that state of ignorance to expose himself to its action, would the fire cease to operate because the man is ignorant? would nature suspend her operations in pity, saying, This man does not understand the nature of heat, and therefore he shall not feel the effects of its excessive use or application? Nothing of the kind occurs in nature. Nature is full of healing and kindness and compassion, always seeking to comfort the wounded and to staunch the fountains of blood, and yet nature makes no note of the persons who misunderstand or misapply her laws. Suppose a man should exclude the living air from his habitation, will nature say that the man, not understanding the utility of the atmosphere, must be excused because of his ignorance? Nature, like her Lord, teaches through suffering. There is no law

written on all the dominion of nature with a broader and clearer hand than that all sin is followed by penalty. Exclude the air, and you exclude vitality ; shut out the light, and you impoverish the life ; doom yourself to solitude, and you doom yourself by the same fiat to extinction. It is in vain to plead that we did not know the nature of air, or the utility of light, or the influence of high things upon things that are low ; we must be taught the depth of our ignorance and its guilt by the intensity and continuance of our personal suffering. Leaving the region of nature and coming into the region of civilisation, we find that even in legal affairs violations of law are not excused on the ground of ignorance. The judge upon the bench does not hesitate to inform the trespasser that he ought to have known the law of which he pleaded ignorance. Again and again this has been known to be the case. That some modification may be allowed, or some concession, is perfectly possible ; but it is distinctly made as a concession, and in no sense as a right. The law has been violated, by neglect, or through ignorance, or wantonly ; and whether in the one way or the other, there it stands in an offended attitude, and nothing can cause it to consent to change its posture. It insists upon the amendment of recognition and the compensation of suffering on the part of the offender. Turning from purely legal criticism of this kind, we find the same law in operation in social affairs. A man is not excused from the consequences of ill-behaviour on the ground that he did not know the customs of society or the technicalities of etiquette. He may be pitied, he may be held in a kind of mild contempt, his name may be used to point a moral ; but at the root of all this criticism lies the law that the man is a trespasser, and that ignorance cannot be pleaded as a complete excuse. This canon of judgment has a very wide bearing upon human affairs. Were it to be justly and completely applied, it would alter many arrangements and relations of life. There are many things which we ought to know, and which we ought to be ; and instead of excusing ourselves by our ignorance, we should be stimulated by its effects to keener inquiry and more diligent culture. That sense of ignorance will possibly show us in what critical conditions our life is being spent. Life is not a broad surface which any eye can read, and which any capacity can comprehend. Life

is a mystery, a complication, a series of causes and effects, a most complex organism which requires continual study and vigilance. We know not upon what we may be launched by the very shortest journey we can take. He is living the life of a fool who imagines that life is a simple affair lying between four visible and measurable points. There is a superficial existence which can be measured as it were by the foot-rule, and weighed in common scales; but life, as inspired and directed by the Holy Ghost, is a sublime mystery. It admits of distinctions, and of classifications absolutely infinite in number. It is the part of Christianity so to operate upon human life as to show the greatness of that life to itself. As the Bible is a progressive revelation, so life is a progressive Apocalypse. To be told in plain and frank terms that man is made in the image and likeness of God is simply to startle the mind with a bold and possibly incredible proposition. That proposition does lie at the very base of Biblical revelation, but its full explanation is only to be realised as the centuries come and go, and after a breadth of education stretching through the experience of many generations. The first thing that a man was told is the last thing which man can understand. Thus we come to the beginning from the end, and only by doubling life back upon itself do we begin to take in the profoundest meanings of the very first statements which were addressed to the reason and the imagination. It is only in the Apocalypse that we begin to understand the Pentateuch. Yet even in such expressions as "If a soul sin through ignorance" we begin to see the meaning of the mystery of the divine nature of man. What watchfulness is imposed upon us by the fact that it is possible to sin through ignorance! If sin were a mere act of violence, we could easily become aware of it, and with comparatively little difficulty we might avoid its repetition. But it is more and other than this. It is committed when we little think of its commission; we inflict wounds when we think our hands are free of all weapons and instruments; we dishonour God when we suppose we are merely silent about him. The voice of nature and of experience, as well as of revelation, is—"The place whereon thou standest is holy ground." The sin may be in a look, in a far-off suggestion, in a tempting tone, in attitudes that have no names, and in breathings that are

inarticulate. Neglect may be sin as well as violence. There is a negative criminality as well as a positive blasphemy. All this makes life most critical and most profoundly solemn. The commandment of God is exceeding broad. Being a divine commandment it comes of continual and minute exactions covering all life with the spirit and obligation of discipline. Not a moment is our own; not a single atom of all the stupendous universe comes within our proprietorship; to-day or to-morrow we may be translated into other spheres of existence; we cannot make a law of any kind that is not local and temporary—a mere convenience for a moment; all the great laws were written before the universe was formed, and they will continue to exist through all changes and developments and processes of being; by their very nature they are eternal, and being eternal they cannot be affected by the conditions which are continually changing the attitude and complexion of our earthly life. Let us be just to the Biblical revelation in all such matters as these sins of ignorance; let us remind ourselves again that we recognise such sins in nature, in law, in social etiquette, in all the various relations of life, and that when we come upon them in the Bible we ought to approach them with a familiarity which itself amounts to an exposition and a vindication. There is nothing arbitrary in these enactments and demands. The God of Providence is the God of the Bible. Providence is the Bible in action, and the Bible is Providence in exposition and contemplation.

The mercy is shown that a special offering was provided for the sin of ignorance. It was recognised as a specialty, and provided for as such. Our business should never be to find the excuse, but rather to confess the sin. The great and gracious law applies here as elsewhere: "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." It is not our place to provide sacrifices. Even the Jews had no sacrifices to provide in the sense of inventing them. The part which the Jew had to act was simply a response to a divine enactment, and in reality that is exactly what we have to do. It is not our business to say how a way can be found out of this sin or that, or what argument can be set up in palliation of the crime which has been committed; the provision has been made, and that provision we must accept

unless we are prepared to fall under a penalty which never fails to follow in the wake of evil-doing. The sin of ignorance never goes alone. Imagine a life so well lived that nothing can be charged upon it but sin due to ignorance! Such a life is an impossibility. It is also impossible for life to be marked only by what are called little or minor sins. There are no such sins, and in proportion as the mind leans to the thought that such sins are possible, is the mind the victim of a most mischievous, and may be fatal, sophism. Life cannot be reduced to a mere negation. We know not what the conditions of life may be in other worlds, but in the region which is described by time, life itself would seem to be steeped in sin, and sin may be regarded, in some sense, as a necessity of life; not a necessity as involving the sovereignty of God, but as revealing the mystery of human nature, under local and probationary conditions, to itself. If one righteous man could have been found upon the earth, the atonement of Christ would have been unnecessary. Atonement does not relate to numbers, or to individuals, or to exceptional instances, as if Christ should have said, "I will die for those who are tainted, for the few or the many who have apostatised"; in that case his death would have been the mere romance of philanthropy, or the fanaticism of perverted divinity; Jesus Christ found no righteous man, and therefore he tasted death for every man; he died for a world lying in the wicked one, and not for certain populations who had been less fortunate than other portions of mankind. Human nature is one. Human sin is one. Divine atonement is one. We disintegrate the universe and turn into trifling the sublime purpose of God when we individualise, and specialise, and make exceptions on behalf of the virtue of this class or that class. The solemn and appalling truth is that there is none righteous, no not one; and however the sin may be critically described, it is simply for the purpose of showing that the sacrifice provided is equal to the refinement and mystery of any new definition that may startle the imagination by its delicacy or unsuspected operation. Take this view of the sacrifices, and it will be shown that the divine mind has anticipated every possible form of human evil and offence. Happily, therefore, the mind can never be surprised into despair by having forced upon it the conviction that some new sin has been

invented, or some new conditions have so surrounded a sin as to take the offence out of the catalogue of the crimes for which divine provision has been made. The specification of sins is not intended to show the keenness and breadth of the divine criticism, but to supply an answer to temptations that might assail the soul and drag it towards the darkness of despair. Let every soul, then, boldly say, as if in solemn monologue, Whatever my sin may be, it is provided for in the great Offering established as the way of access to the Father ; I will invent no excuses ; I will seek for no new methods of payment or compensation ; I will bring no price in my hand, no excuse on my tongue, nor will I hide even in the depths of my consciousness any hope that I can vindicate my position before God ; I will simply fall into the hands of the Living One, and look upon the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. In that spirit I will go forward to judgment, and in that spirit I will encounter the mysteries of destiny.

NOTE.

It was in the sprinkling of the blood, the proper sacrament of sacrifice, that the distinction between the guilt offering and the expiatory offering, in the narrow sense, came most clearly to the front ; and it is easy to understand why it would reveal itself most plainly here. As it was right that the blood of an expiatory offering for public transgressions should be made far more conspicuous to eyes and sense, so it was sprinkled on an elevated place, or even on one which was extraordinarily sacred. The way, too, in which this was done was marked by three stages. If the atonement was made for an ordinary man, or for a prince, the priest sprinkled the blood against the high towering horns of the outer altar, and poured the remainder, as usual, out at its base ; if it was made for the community, or for the high-priest, some of the blood was seven times sprinkled against the veil of the Holy of Holies, then some more against the horns of the inner altar, and only what was then left was poured out, as usual, at the base of the outer altar. The third, and highest stage of expiation was adopted on the yearly day of atonement. On the other hand, in the case of the guilt offering, no reason existed for adopting any unusual mode of sprinkling the blood. It was sprinkled, just as in other cases, round the sides and foot of the outer altar. As soon as this most sacred ceremony of the sprinkling was completed, then, according to the ancient belief, the impurity and guilt were already shaken off from the object to which they had clung.—EWALD.

Leviticus v.

MORAL CONTAGION.

IN reading this chapter take notice of the expression, "if a soul touch any unclean thing, whether it be a carcase of an unclean beast, or a carcase of unclean cattle, or the carcase of unclean creeping things, and if it be hidden from him; he also shall be unclean, and guilty." Why this continual dread of uncleanness? Call these, if you please, merely sanitary arrangements, yet why this early care about matters connected with human health? Is not the provision totally in excess of the occasion? Is not this an instance of much ado about nothing? Do men require all these instructions and the continual supervision of all this judgment in matters connected with the health and purity of the body? Let that be granted, and nothing whatever is taken from the urgency and solemnity of the spiritual appeal; on the contrary, the very circumstance that so much ado is made about fleshly cleanliness increases the poignancy of the appeal dealing with spiritual health and vigour. Those who suppose that the whole ritual of the Jews related to sanitation must not imagine that even if their position could be proved—which from my point of view is impossible—they have at all impaired the cogency and completeness of any appeal which may be addressed to the moral sense. The fact is, that man could not be made apart from the moral sense to comprehend even such an appeal were it restricted to the body. In other words, we could not be really cleanly in body and soundly in earnest about physical sanitation except through the medium of the conscience as well as through the action of the judgment. The judgment is often but an impotent director of human conduct. We may say with the ancient poet, "We see the right, and yet the wrong pursue." It is really only when the moral sense is thoroughly aroused and inspired that the judgment itself is lifted

to its right level and brought into complete action in all practical matters. We will not, therefore, be turned aside from the spiritual appeal which may be founded upon these exhortations by being told that in the first instance the exhortation was related to matters that were purely sanitary. This avoidance of unclean animals and places is not without practical illustration in our own personal experience and action. To-day, for example, we avoid places that are known to be fever-stricken. We are alarmed lest we should bring ourselves within the influence of contagion. The strongest man might fear if he knew that a letter were put into his hand which had come from a house where fever was fatally raging. However heroic he might be in sentiment, and however inclined to boast of the solidity of his nervous system, it is not impossible that even the strongest man might shrink from taking the hand of a fever-stricken friend. All this is natural and all this is justifiable, and, in fact, any defiance of this would be unnatural and unjustifiable. Is there, then, no suggestion in all such rational caution that there may be moral danger from moral contagion? Can a body emit pestilence and a soul dwell in all evil and riot in all wantonness without giving out an effluvium fatal to moral vigour and to spiritual health? The suggestion is preposterous. They are the unwise and most reprehensible men who being afraid of a fever have no fear of a moral pestilence; who running away in moral terror from influences leading towards small-pox, cholera, and other fatal diseases, rush into companionships, and actions, and servitudes which are positively steeped and saturated with moral pollution. That we are more affected by the one than by the other only shows that we are more body than soul. The man who is careful about his body and careless about his soul does not prove the littleness of the soul in itself or in the purpose of God: he simply proves that in his case the flesh is overgrown and has acquired excessive importance. It would be the merest conceit did it not also involve deep moral injury to imagine that human life can be lived without any exposure to moral contagion. This is a mystery which has no words. The temptation does not always come to us in some violent form which can be measured, estimated, and physically or substantially resisted either in action or in argument. The elements which poison the

air are of the subtlest kind, and can only be detected by the most advanced chemistry. This is true in the moral atmosphere. What a suggestion may do it is impossible always to foretell. At first it may seem to be of little weight, or it may actually appear to be forgotten, to sink wholly out of memory and consciousness ; but it is impossible to tell how long it may lie in the soul latently and under what circumstances it may begin to bear evil fruit in the spirit and the life. Strange, indeed, if such things are possible in nature and impossible in morals ! A truly wonderful thing if after all it should be found that physical conditions involve greater mysteries than spiritual possibilities and destinies ! This would be an inversion of thought—a turning upside down of all that has been customary in intellectual conception and representation. The Christian whilst protesting against such inversion as irrational and unnatural will accept every mystery that is hidden in nature as indicating a still greater mystery that is to be found in the kingdom of thought and of spiritual activity. It seems to be impossible to escape contagion of a moral kind. All contagion is so wide-sweeping in its influence,—that is to say, it operates at points so far distant from any visible and tangible centre, that we easily dissociate the effect from the cause and imagine harmlessness in the very centres of most active and pestilent mischief. It is of the nature of moral contagion that it operates with equal vigour at every point along the line over which it stretches. It loses nothing by distance ; it loses nothing by time. The evil book written a century ago may be bearing fruit to-day, though its author is not only dead but forgotten. Sometimes evil lies a hundred years or more without showing signs of vitality or effectiveness, and then under peculiar conditions is awakened and becomes most active and disastrous. As we grow in moral capacity and in the sensitiveness which accompanies spiritual culture we shall come to acknowledge that stains may be worse than wounds ; that one speck upon the honour is infinitely worse than the deepest gash that could be inflicted by the cruellest sword upon the flesh. This is a matter which cannot be taught abstractly or in a moment ; it comes after long years of study, thought, experience, and those reciprocal actions which make up the mystery of social life. At first we are affected by a crime ; then we are unsettled

by the suggestion of an offence ; then, still advancing in spiritual culture and sensitiveness, we come to see that though the crime itself may never be done, yet the motive which even for a moment suggested it is a deadlier thing than the crime itself : for the crime is a mere vulgarity which might be partially excused by passion, but the motive is a condition of the heart which indicates the apostasy and utter badness of the soul. A singular thing this, that unclean things may be touched by the soul itself. Literally, the text does not refer in all probability to a purely spiritual action, yet not the less is the suggestion justified by experience that even the soul considered in its most spiritual sense may touch things that are unclean and may be defiled by them. A poor thing indeed that the hand has kept itself away from pollution and defilement if the mind has opened wide all the points of access to the influence of evil. Sin may not only be in the hand, it may be rolled as a sweet morsel under the tongue. There may be a chamber of imagery in the heart. A man may be utterly without offence in any social acceptance of that term—actually a friend of magistrates and judges, and himself a high interpreter of the law of social morality and honour, and yet all the while may be hiding a very perdition in his heart. It is the characteristic mystery of the salvation of Jesus Christ that it does not come to remove stains upon the flesh or spots upon the garments, but to work out an utter and eternal cleansing in the secret places of the soul, so that the heart itself may in the event be without “spot or wrinkle or any such thing,”—pure, holy, radiant, even dazzling with light, fit to be looked upon by the very eye of God.

This is the ideal of Christ : how far we may be from its accomplishment is not the immediate question. It is of the highest consequence to remember what the ultimate purpose of the Son of God is, and then to bring to bear upon that purpose all the instruments and methods, all the ministries and influences which are utilised by the living Spirit. Between the one and the other the happiest harmony will be seen to exist. It is by his own precious blood that Jesus Christ seeks to remove the stain, not of crime but of sin, not of the hand but of the soul. The adoption of such means to such ends involves an inscrutable philosophy. No wonder that eternity gone and eternity to come are

both charged with this sacred mystery. The Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world, and the song which celebrates his praise is to be continued long after the earth and all its tragedies have passed away. This mystery is not confined within the bounds of time; those bounds, in fact, do but show one aspect of the mystery; it belongs to eternity on both sides of time, and we shall require eternity for its elucidation, and our comprehension of its gracious meaning. The one thing to be borne in mind at present is that the soul is still exposed to the contagion of uncleanness. We fight against the prince of the power of the air; we fight with ourselves; sometimes we seem to be our own tempters, and to have within us all the mystery of hell. A wonderful thing is this matter of touch. Who can touch pitch and not be defiled? It has not been given to us so to encase ourselves, even so far as the body is concerned, that we shall be impervious to evil influences working in the air. Where, then, is our defence against the evil that is in the world? Jesus Christ does not pray that we may be taken out of the world, but that we may be kept from the evil that is in the world; he will have us here as the light of the world, as the salt of the earth, as a city set upon a hill; he will not operate in any spirit of cowardice and fear, withdrawing us from temporal regions and temporal activities lest the wind should be too cold for us, or the enemy should surprise us into some new lapse, and so spoil our integrity and turn our prayers to confusion. Christ will have us live the heroic life,—a heroism that is often carried to the point of defiance, as if we could not only merely overcome the enemy but actually and absolutely trample him underfoot, in excess of triumph and in redundancy of divinely-given strength. We must not altogether take the view of contagion which is full of unhappy and dispiriting suggestions. There is another view, and that we are bound as Christian men to adopt—namely, that good may be as contagious as evil. It is difficult to believe this. Human nature seems to be so constituted that evil outruns good and has altogether an easier task than virtue to accomplish. It is easier to go downhill than to go uphill. It seems to suit human nature better not to do duty than to discharge it, not to submit to discipline than to accept it. This is indeed a practical mystery which can only be accounted for completely and satisfactorily by

the provision which has been made on the divine side to meet it and overcome it. Still there does remain the sacred and happy impression that even good has its contagious effect upon society. Men may be shamed into withholding part of their strength at least from evil service. Such restraints may not end in a very high type of virtue; in the meantime the very suspension of active evil may prepare the way for something better. The force of example must never be under-estimated. If we once begin to think that evil is predominant over good, and that the bad man alone is influential, we may relax in our efforts and underlive the great purpose of our vocation in Christ. Rather let us hear the Master's voice saying,—“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” The very argument of Christ in the Sermon upon the Mount is that good men are the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

In the fourteenth verse of this chapter there is a remarkable expression, bearing upon a certain type of sin. The law was that if a soul committed trespass and sinned through ignorance in the holy things of the Lord, he was to bring for his trespass unto the Lord a ram without blemish, out of the flocks, and other offerings,—“and he shall make amends for the harm that he hath done in the holy thing, and shall add the fifth part thereto.” The ritual was not, therefore, merely sanitary. Those who would limit it to merely sanitary matters will find it difficult to reconcile the mere details of sanitation with such arrangements as were imposed upon the Jewish people or the Israelites with regard to restitution. What is the law in this case? Whatever harm was done was, as far as possible, to be undone. That being the case one would suppose that the property having been restored, nothing further could be attempted. This is not the case. Not only was restitution to be completed, but twenty per cent. was to be added by way of penalty on the one side, and compensation on the other. It is not enough to prove that a man who has been injured has been unjustly injured. It is not the law that a man having been proved not to have committed some offence charged against him, shall simply accept the acquittal. Acquittal must be followed by compensation. Where injury has been done it cannot be met by a mere apology—except, indeed,

by the grace and courtesy of the man upon whom the injury has been inflicted. Society by its very constitution must go further, and demand that the person who has been unjustly accused shall be compensated for the injury which he has sustained in the estimation of his fellow-men, and, indeed, in his own complacency and conscious integrity. Morality of this kind is most acceptable in any book professing to be a revelation of the divine mind. It is at such points especially that we can lay hold of the purposes of the book, and by keeping them steadily in mind, can wait further light and broadening revelation, conscious that a morality so pure and so just must be the beginning of a dispensation that shall vindicate its own spirituality and broader claim. It is peculiarly characteristic of the Bible that it insists upon justice between man and man, that it will not excuse the great man or the small man, but it will have an equal law, and will bring to bear its spirit of discipline upon every soul, whatever may be the conditions and characteristics which give it partiality and preference amongst its fellows. This is a claim of the Bible to human trust and reception. It can never be set aside by criticism, by casuistry, by speculative unbelief; it appeals to the conscience of mankind, and it says to that conscience—Whatever difficulties or mysteries I may yet address to your imagination, hold fast by these plain and substantial truths; if my purpose is absolutely unimpeachable in morality, the very spirit of justice, and honour, and truth; and in proportion as you appreciate the social side of the revelation will every other side be made luminous, and ultimately vindicate itself by its equally practical beneficence.

God will have nothing to do with uncleanness. "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings"—is the continual voice of God to the human soul. He will pity weakness; he will not be offended by ungainliness; he understands all the meaning of poverty;—in all these directions we have nothing to fear; but when we hide uncleanness, or endeavour to make excuse for sin, all heaven burns against us with unquenchable anger. This is another aspect of the morality of the Bible. Even when Christ sat down to meat with publicans and sinners, he recognised their character and did not seek to confound their manhood and their merely official position. This must be the

clear understanding everywhere: that the Bible will have no immorality, no trifling with righteousness, no compromises with the wicked spirit. The Bible insists upon holiness in the inward parts—a morality that can bear the criticism of the divine righteousness—and how great soever its compassion for weakness, poverty, frailty, and all the various characteristics of fallen humanity that do not involve consent to that which is evil, the Bible can hold no intercourse or parleying whatsoever with any soul that would cling to its uncleanness, and yet expect to enjoy the fellowship or complacency of God. This is not only an anomaly, but a miracle which lies beyond the omnipotence of Heaven.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, our altar is already built: we come unto the Cross of Jesus Christ our Saviour, and there offer such prayer as thou mayest inspire in our hearts. Thou hast moved us to pray every day for pardon; if we confess our sins, thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sins. Grant unto us the grace of confession—the power of uttering in thine ear all the tale of sin and wrong, keeping back nothing from the divine eye, but calling attention to everything we have done which is amiss. Thus, by knowing our sin, and naming it in the hearing of God and in the sight of the Cross, may the burden be dissolved, and instead of despair may the joy of conscious pardon and release take possession of our hearts and utter itself in the music of continual praise. We thank thee that thou hast come near to us with gospels of forgiveness. Thou couldest have blinded us with glory, or amazed us with wonders, without associating these disclosures of thy power with tenderness and willingness to redeem and to forgive; but thou hast caused the Cross of Christ to represent the fulness of thy miraculous power; and we behold in it—not only almightiness, but compassion, not only omnipotence, but the tenderness of the heart of God. Do thou instruct us in all the way of life. Keep quite near to us; may we never be beyond the reach of thine ear—not only because of our loudness and crying, but when we whisper, may we be so near, thou so near, that we may hold fellowship one with another. Let the sky of our life brighten above our head, let the last cloud be cleansed from the horizon, and let a great brightness of complacency shine upon us from above; then shall we walk in thy light and take counsel of thee, and obey thee with industry and gladness. Write thy word for us every day; accommodate thy light to our vision; be nearest to us when we most need thee; and give us triumph in the night-time; and in despair, in great sorrow, and in floods of tears, may we always be found steadfast in faith, ardent in love, bright in spiritual hope, renewing our confidence continually in God, and purifying the motive by which our whole life's action is determined.

The Lord hear us, and in the hearing give us answers of peace. Amen.

Leviticus vi. 1-7.

1. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
2. If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the Lord, and lie unto his neighbour in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbour ;
3. Or have found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it, and sweareth falsely ; in any of all these that a man doeth, sinning therein :
4. Then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found,
5. Or all that about which he hath sworn falsely ; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering.
6. And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the Lord, a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest :
7. And the priest shall make an atonement for him before the Lord : and it shall be forgiven him for any thing of all that he hath done in trespassing therein.

PRACTICAL RELIGION.

A CURIOUS combination of words is this in the second verse—
“ . . . a trespass against the Lord, and lie unto his neighbour.” What have the terms “Lord” and “neighbour” to do with one another? Have we not partitioned off society into special and unrelated departments? Who shall venture to throw down the lines which we have set up and to make one common society of earth and heaven? Already here is a forth-shadowing of the two commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets—namely: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbour as thyself.” There has always been some vital connection between “Lord” and “neighbour”;—how is this? Do we not pass too roughly over such conjunctions, taking them as mere matters of course—a jingling of words, hiding no music, modifying no eternity of power and right? We are bungling readers at the best; we do not extract from the

word its root, and life, and soul. May not that man sin against his neighbour, and yet say his prayers as if nothing had been done to violate the sanctity of upper and spiritual relations? May not a man kneel upon his overthrown neighbour, and in that attitude of oppression and triumph plead with the complacent heavens? Verily, the Bible is a book which takes part with the "neighbour"; it is a chivalrous revelation. To have come from heaven it comes with wondrous earthly sympathy and sense of right and rule of judgment. From this point of view the book *may* be inspired! When we sin against our neighbour, we sin against God; when we remove the ancient landmark, we violate the altar; when we tell lies to society, we smite heaven with blasphemy. This is the spirit of the book. Such spirit makes us strong, leads out our love in adoration towards the book as towards a living protector, and friend, and guide. Were it full of ghosts—a great theatre of possible spiritual presences, having no relation to our life except to alarm it, we might flee away in terror and leave it to men who have skill in communing with ghostly presences; but it takes care of the flock in the field, it will not allow an ancient hedge to be taken down without a just equivalent being rendered, it will not have a bird's little nest torn to pieces without protest and judgment; it is a domestic book: it looks after the house-fire and the house-table and all things belonging to our little daily life; it has an infinite sky, but, blessed be God, it is also a world about the size of a house—a house watched with the eyes of love. A book that cares so much for "neighbours" is a book which by so much arrests the moral attention and may reward the moral confidence of mankind.

Violence, deceit, false-swearing,—why these are the sins of to-day. There is nothing original in sinning. The old vulgarity, and the old refinement upon it, we find from the beginning. Consider the words, for there is a philosophy in their very order: "violence," "deceit," "perjury." You cannot invert that order without violating the philosophy of true development and evolution. There is an inspiration of order as well as of substance, and that inspiration is written here and proved by the fullest and happiest verification. We all begin with "violence." The first man begins branch-breaking and fruit-stealing. He tells no lie, he has no deep plot against the Eternal: he puts out his hand and wrenches the branch, and the crash of that

wood, hitherto untouched, sends pain through all the garden. The next man kills his enemy. The world's sin began with violence; by-and-by violent men see that there is another way of accomplishing the purpose of the evil heart, so, without smiting and fire-kindling and rudeness, they begin to conspire and plot, and attach new meanings to words, and infuse unsuspected colours into the speech of commerce as between man and man: so language becomes manifold instead of simple: to the speaker it means one thing, to the hearer it means another thing, though the terms are the common property of the nation. After "deceit" comes the profanation of holy terms—the sin against what may be termed the Holy Ghost of speech. We are, therefore, no further than this Old Testament text to-day; some are committing violence, some are plotting deceitful schemes and conspiracies, and others are standing up and insulting the spirit of truth—lying not unto men, but unto God. There you have the range of the devil's power: he oscillates from violence to perjury, touching the intermediate point of deceit. There is no genius in such an enemy; he is not fertile in invention; subjected to honest analysis he is to be laid out plainly on the world's table in three parts,—violence, deceit, perjury; and all the sin that can be committed can be brought under these three categories or one of them. And all this may be done away by offering to the priest "a ram without blemish out of the flock"! Bring the "ram" and all will be well! Steal the forbidden fruit, kill the hated Abel, swear with larger boldness than the audacity of Ananias and Sapphira, and when you are done, see to it that you pick out the right "ram," offer it to the pontiff, let him slay it, and all will be well! That is an easy way out of difficulty! It is; but it is not the way of the Bible. Many persons who think they have escaped the Jewish ritual suppose they have only to see the priest, whisper the tale into his ear, furnish their "ram," and go home released and sanctified. If they imagine a delusion so deep and aggravated in its infatuation, then they have indeed escaped Leviticus and the whole Pentateuch, and every line of the Gospels and the Epistles—the whole canon of revelation. Mistakes are made about this matter which are of vital consequence. We have given the enemy occasion to mock us a good deal in some of these applications; we have so acted as to leave upon the enemy the impression that we can obliterate a

whole week's work of violence, deceit and perjury by going to church on Sunday—especially if we are so learned in ancient law as to be quite sure that we have escaped the ancient ritual and now stand in the liberty of wantonness and in the blasphemy of licentiousness. There is to be no Sunday catharism—washing by the priest or washing by the sinner's own hand—until something else has been done. What was the ancient law? The offender was to restore that which was taken away by violence, or that about which deceit was practised, or that wherein perjury was committed. That is the first step in the process. The whole thing in controversy must be replaced. Now may the man pray? No. There is no *quid pro quo* in morals. You cannot balance a crime by an apology; and you cannot drive iron into wood and extract it without leaving a wound behind. Extraction is not enough, restoration is not sufficient; after the full quantity has been restored, the man is to add twenty per cent. to it. If he has robbed his employer of one hundred pounds, he must replace the hundred pounds, and he must add twenty pounds to it,—*then* he may go to church! What a blessed thing it would be for some men if they could have escaped Leviticus!—for those men who sneer at the Old Testament as at an obsolete document, made yellow by time, good enough in its day but outworn by the magazines of the hour. You cannot outlive morality, moral judgment, righteousness. There is no back door through what is called natural law by which we can escape the eternal demand and claim of truth. After restoration and the addition of the fifth part thereto, the man was to go and see the pontiff of Israel and arrange about the offering of the ram. The process was not complete until the ram had been offered. We do not sin downward only, we sin upward as well. Every social offence has a religious bearing; every wrong done in the marketplace reports itself in heaven. Thus life is solemn: actions have rebounds, and throbs, and issues, often incalculable, often infinite. The criminal has a hard life of it in the Bible. Some men have escaped the Bible; that is the reason they treat one another so violently, or with so fine a deceit, or with so flat a perjury. The moral tone of the Bible begets confidence. The book wants things to be foursquare, real, solid. A book with such a claim cannot be displaced by the most elaborate argument that founds itself upon smoke and rises into the dignity of evaporation. The

Bible will have what is right: therefore, the Bible *may* be inspired! No such morality have I met in any other book accessible to me. Bible morality is critical, minute, detailed,—most critical and exacting. There is no rough and ready method of bringing things to temporary equipoise. Nothing is settled until the root is made right, the fountain is purified, restoration is completed, compensation is effected, and prayer is said over the blood that atones.

Mark the process of repentance as well as the process of sin. There is a philosophy in the one as certainly as there is in the other. How was the offender to begin? He was to begin at the moral point. Preachers may be too much afraid of preaching in this tone, because they are afraid of being stigmatised by epithets that have nothing in them but the spite of their own utterers and mean inventors. We must not be afraid of preaching works and laws and rights. We do not honour the Book by such fear; we misinterpret its spirit and misapply its claim. Begin with the moral and work towards the spiritual—restore, compensate, pray. No doubt it would suit some conditions of human nature to begin at the other end, because something might occur in the reverse process to prevent the completion of the whole. Hear not those priests—though their name be Aaron—who tell you to begin in metaphysical regions and work your way downwards, little by little, until you begin to bring back the property you stole. Restore the property before you see the high-priest, and give a twentieth part of that which is taken back to the owner of that which was lost. Having done what is possible to humanity, begin the upper movement, and close the process with a look towards God. Let us have no whining, no canting, no sentimentality; let us rebuke the enemy wherein he thinks we are fanatics and can pray ourselves out of duties, bankruptcies, and moral obligations. Is this preaching morality? I shall be thankful if that impression be made, for it is the one impression I wish to stamp upon the judgment and conscience of all men. This offers opportunities to every one immediately. It is not to be left to the offender first to obtain exactly clear views of the constitution of the Godhead before he begins to repay the man he has robbed. Believe me, we are not thus circumstanced that we have to fix upon a definite

theory of the atonement—for even the atonement has been debased into a theory—until we begin to undo that which we have done amiss. We can restore stolen property : we can add to it a fifth part thereof or more,—we may double it ; and having done so, we must then ask pardon. Any Iscariot can throw back the thirty pieces of silver ; but the only end of such villainy is to be hanged, and to die an unpitied death. We are not at liberty, as Christians, to put down upon a man's threshold the money we stole, or the property we abstracted, and to run away drying our lips and lifting up our eyes to heaven and saying—"All is now well !" We have not lied unto man only, we have lied unto God ; we have wounded the Spirit of truth ; we have outraged the harmony of heaven. We have a great religious task now to achieve and accomplish. A book insisting upon such regulations will hold its own when all the insects that have gathered upon it to eat it up have fallen away into forgetfulness. All wronged men should revere the Bible ; it takes up their case ; it insists upon justice being done to them, and upon justice blossoming into restoration, and restoration being crowned with prayer, atonement, and reconciliation. Bad men should dread the Bible ; they have not a friend in any one of its pages ; not one of its complete proverbs can they quote in vindication of evil spirit or of evil action. Men anxious about social regeneration and harmony should go to the Bible for law, precept and guidance. What is this but Christianity anticipated ? Moses and the Lamb are at one here as elsewhere and everywhere. Said Christ—"Think not I am come to destroy. . . . I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." Did Christ say anything about evil and the method of treating that evil before religious postures were assumed or oblations were attempted ? He did. What did he say ? He said, in spirit, exactly what Moses said. He saw men coming to the altar about to offer their gifts and to say their prayers, and he stopped them on the road and said to them—"How stands it with you and your neighbour ?" "My neighbour ?" "Yes. Has thy brother aught against thee ? Is there a feeling of hostility in thy heart against thy brother—thy brother-man ? If there is, do not go to the altar ; you can do nothing there, except dishonour the very stones of which

it is built. First go and be reconciled to thy brother—make human and social relations right, begin at the visible point, make an impression upon the parties immediately concerned and through them upon observers,—then go and offer thy gift.” Can we part with a book of which this is the moral tone! Here is a lesson for inquirers into the inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture. We cannot all begin at the uppermost points; many of us cannot seize recondite matters and adjust and determine them by adequate scholarship and information; but we can all begin our inquiry by asking, What is the moral tone of the book? What does it want to be at in its actual issue? It wants to reconcile man with man, to have restoration made where injury has been done; it would bring every man on his knees to the offended person saying—“I have brought back that which I took away; I restore fourfold; pity me, forgive me, stoop over me and lift me up from this proper humiliation.” Does the book breathe a spirit of that kind? If so, no devil wrote it; no bad man ever inspired it; no clique of wrongdoers ever got up so complete a conspiracy. It would have father and mother honoured—it would have the old folks at home made young again every day by the action of filial obedience, filial sympathy and filial help; it would set aside one day for rest every week—sweet holy day: as far as possible, everything should stand still and rest awhile, taking its breath again, and looking the great look that takes in horizons and skies, constellations and thrones and powers; it would have honesty the law of life; it would have every loaf of pure flour without any leaven of untruthfulness, sharp practice, or evil skill in outwitting men. Is that the moral tone of the book? If so, I will not now trouble myself (the young inquirer may say) by questions I cannot now handle and perhaps may never be able to handle, but seeing that the book comes with such assertions of right and such claims, and insists upon them, and will in no sense be eluded, I will begin at that point,—who knows but I may, step by step, go into the interior of the holy temple and see the inner lights and touch the inner mysteries? That is the right resolve; the issue of it will be that you will discover that the Sacred Book is one—one as the many-coloured and resplendent sky.

Leviticus vi. 13.

“ The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar ; it shall never go out.”

THE CONTINUAL BURNING.

BUT may not the people cease to sin before morning, and the fire be put out in the night-time ? Does it not assume too much about the frailty and sinfulness of man to keep a fire up always ? Would it not be better to extinguish it sometimes, just to suggest to the observers that a great hope has sprung up in the divine heart that perhaps this day there will be no more need for sacrifice ? If the fire were put out, would not that itself be a gospel ? Such are the questions that force themselves upon us when we come face to face with decrees and fiats and laws that have about them the awfulness of eternity. It is the expressions, “ for ever,” “ evermore,” “ never”—terms which exhaust all time—that the soul cannot peruse without shuddering and inexpressible distress. It would seem as if God had no hope for his people. There is no opportunity for the exercise of feeling on the part of man that God sees a way out of the continual sin which needs the continual sacrifice. There is no touch of grace in this command ; it is stern, unrelieved by a tear of pathos, never trembling with the feeling which makes all things sacred. If a man should reason thus concerning this passage, his reasoning would be correct within the points which he has assigned as its scope ; but the view is partial, the distances are not properly regulated, the whole idea has not been seized by the observant mind. Suppose the sin should cease, would the fire then be put out ? Certainly not. The fire has a double significance ; it is not there only to consume the sacrifice, it is there to express the continual aspiration of the soul. The fire still burns. There is an unquenchable fire in heaven. To love is to worship ; to love rightly is to worship rightly. The choice of expression is left with us, the choice of posture and

method ; but where the spirit is right with God its action is best symbolised by the unquenchable fire, the aspiring flame.

It is instructive and partially distressing to hear many of the congratulations regarding the progress which has been made in the matter of divine worship ; it is most pitiful. Christians congratulate themselves in profane complacency that they have nothing to do with altars and fires and sacrifices of the herd, and of the flocks, and of the fowls, whether of turtle-doves or of young pigeons : they have escaped all that complicated and expensive mechanism—they have escaped more than that, or that fool's boast would not be on their lips. The truly progressive man has escaped nothing ; he is still where the Jew was, with new uses and higher disciplines, with keener penetrations into divine intent and purpose, and with a correspondingly severe and oppressive discipline. But the spirit is found also, not only as expressed in contrasts between Christianity and Judaism, but in contrasts between ancient Christian times and modern Christian usages—the same selfishness of felicitation. Who has not heard modern flippancy, often misappropriating the garb of piety, congratulating itself that it does not live in Puritan times ? Verily, we delight in setting down our escapes from discipline, and burden, and exaction, and training. Modern pietetic flippancy rejoices that it does not listen to the Puritan preacher, who, having preached the hour-glass empty, quietly inverted it in the sight of the people, and preached it empty again. Our felicitations are all of a most pitiful kind. We have escaped all the Jewish ceremony, all the Puritan tediousness—into what liberty have we come ? What is the practical result of all such escapes ? A greater love of brevity, a keener sense of liberty, which really means in such lips licentiousness ; we have nothing to do, nothing to give, nothing to suffer, all to enjoy, and just when we please, and as much as we please, and thus we have sunk into the idolatry of self. To suppose that discipline has ceased is to give up all that is worth living for. Our object should not be to escape discipline, but to make commandments pleasant, to turn statutes into songs in the house of our pilgrimage, to make obedience not a penalty but a delight. Listen to Christian talk to-day, listen to the monologue of your own heart, and the chief delight is found in having escaped all things requiring military discipline, Spartan

exaction, obedience that keeps nothing back. When that becomes the law of the family, the family is practically broken up, decentralised, because the altar of discipline is destroyed. When that becomes the law of the Church, there is no Church left ; it is a broken-down temple ; the owls, and the bitterns, and the satyrs may take possession of the deserted place. What then is there permanent in such commands as the one which is now before us ? Let us allow that accidents, accessories, incidental complexions and postures, have all passed away ; but the tree has not consummated its purpose when it has shed its blossom. What is the eternal quantity ? The altar is the principal feature in the truly consecrated life—an invisible altar, but not the less the place of worship, of meeting with the Divine One, of conference with Heaven,—not a local altar : “neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem,” shall men exclusively “worship the Father,” but on every mountain and in every city, and in the unstable church of the sea. What then have we lost ? A few pieces of stone, a certain construction in rude wilderness masonry ; but that was not the altar : it was but the representation of the altar of the soul. The walls and roof we call the church are not the Church ; the Church is within those walls and yet infinitely beyond those walls and that localising roof. We should live in a kingdom of symbols, hints, living suggestions—a place awful by the vitality of its inspirations. How can this doctrine be taught to carnal men ? It requires a century of millenniums to begin the great spiritual mystery. A misconception of the altar leads to idolatry—to the idolatry of places, and to the idolatry of offices. What we can see is not the altar ; the stone altar is a medium through which the soul may get swift glimpses of the altar beyond, where spirits kneel, where souls burn in ardent desire, where angels hover in wonder and in hope. No marvel that we become less and less in mind and affection if we have mistaken any building of stone for God’s house. It is the beginning of the house, the outward and visible form of the house, a halting-place where we may unloose the sandal for a time and set up the staff in the corner, and wait awhile, and get breath by praying. We must be up and on, seeking the house not made with hands, of which all good houses and hospitable homes are but dim hints and types.

Aspiration is the highest expression of character. That is the permanent quantity in the text. Fire ascends; it speechlessly says, "This is not my home; I must travel, I must fly, I must return; the sun calls me, and I must obey." A character without aspiration cannot live healthily and exercise a vital and ennobling influence. When religion becomes mere controversy, it has lost veneration; and whatever or whoever loses veneration slips away from the centre of things, and falls evermore into thickening darkness. There is a philosophy in this conception as well as a theology. To aspire is to grow. It is an action full of meaning; it signifies, being expressed in many words, that we are not yet content: there is something in us which seeks completion; there is a spirit weary of solitude that yearns for fellowship, and that cannot be content with any communion of a human and visible kind; there is a soul in man that holds time and space in solemn contempt, and seeks rest in infinite liberties and harmonies. Without this aspiration man becomes a mere grub; he dwells upon the earth and accommodates himself to his little prison; no storm of anger rises within because of the poverty of the place; it is good enough to eat and drink in, ample enough to lie down in, and beyond these poor exercises the man so lost has no desire. Here is the place at which the Christian religion directs its most powerful appeal to human attention and confidence. It is a solemn religion, so solemn that many times it cannot argue; it will not criticise; it leaves the region of words and rises to the rapture of silence. Here, too, arises that marvellous pathos which will keep evangelical doctrine from desuetude and contempt. No religion that is not rich in pathos can live long or make itself world-wide in influence. Controversies perish in the air which separates one nation from another; pathos comes with every wind, shines with every rising day, and glows in every westering sun—"makes the whole world kin."

"Jesus wept"—will be a power in human thought and human need when all critical questions have vexed themselves to death and perished in unholy and unprofitable abortiveness. We are conscious of a perpetual need; we cannot be satisfied. We mock one another sometimes in language not intended to be mischievous or reproachful when we ask if we cannot *now* rest

and be thankful—sit down and enjoy ourselves. We ought to do so with regard to things temporal and measurable, and if things temporal and measurable were all, then the inquiry would take upon itself a very high moral solemnity ; but all this outreaching, striving, discontent—all this aching, poverty, and burning desire for more and more conquest and territory, wealth and influence, has a religious meaning, and that meaning being put into words is that the soul has not room enough in space, duration enough in time, but, by its discontent, expresses the magnificence of its origin and its destiny.

“The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar ; it shall never go out.”

Then there are two things in the text—“fire” and “altar.” We may have an altar, but no fire. That is the deadly possibility ; that is the fatal reality. The world is not dying for want of a creed, but for want of faith. We are not in need of more prayers, we are in need of more prayerfulness. If the little knowledge we have—how small it is the wisest men know best of all—were turned to right use, fire in its happiest influences would soon begin to be detected by surrounding neighbours and by unknown observers. Of what avail is it that we have filled the grate with fuel if we have not applied the flame ? Does the unlighted fuel warm the chamber ? No more does the unsanctified knowledge help to redeem and save society. We need the fire as well as the altar. Magnificent altars we have built : we have brought stone from afar ; we have hewn it in the field that there might be no noise near the temple ; we have set it up and made ourselves proud in the contemplation of the skilful building. It is nothing ; it is a lie ; it is an imposition ; it is the sign of self-idolatry ; we have mistaken the means for the end, the process for the result. What is needed now is a fire that will burn the altar itself—turn the marble and porphyry and granite and hewn soft-stone all into fuel that shall go up in a common oblation to the waiting heavens.

We may have fire and no altar, as well as have an altar and no fire. This is also a mistake. We ought to have religious places and Christian observances, locality with special meaning, resting-places with heaven's welcome written upon their portals. There is a deadly sophism lurking in the supposition that men

can have the fire without the altar, and are independent of institutions, churches, families, places, Bibles, and all that is known by Christian arrangement for common worship. We are not meant to be solitary worshippers. When a man says he can read the Bible at home, I deny it. He can *partially* read it there, he can see some of its meaning there ; but society is one, as well as is the individual, in some degrees and in some relations. There is a religion of fellowship as well as of solitude. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together : there is a touch that helps life to gather itself up into its full force ; there is a contagion which makes the heart feel strong in masonry. When a man says he can pray at home, I deny it—except in the sense that he can there *partially* pray. He can transact part of the commerce which ought to be going on continually between heaven and earth, earth and heaven ; but there is a common prayer—the family cry, the congregational intercession, the sense that we are praying for one another in common petition at the throne of grace. It may be that one voice only is heard, but when that voice has been touched by the inspiration of Heaven, it will have priestly tones in it, great expressiveness, touching every known experience, and speaking in one great language a thousand otherwise unutterable desires.

It is not enough to kindle a fire : we must renew it. “The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar ; it shall never go out.” Did not some men burn once who are cold now ? Have not some men allowed the holy flame to perish ? and is not their life now like a deserted altar laden with cold, white ashes ? Once they sang sweetly, prayed with eagerness of expectation, worked with both hands diligently, were always open to Christian appeal, focalised their lives in one poignant inquiry—Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? I know of no drearier spectacle than to see a man who still bears the Christian name on the altar of whose heart the fire has gone out. That is a possibility. Lost enthusiasm means lost faith ; lost passion means lost conviction. Do not let us delude ourselves with the notion that if we are less enthusiastic and passionate, vehement and openly heroic, we are all the stronger and the more truly consolidated men. The devil there cheats us with long words ; the enemy persuades us with false reasoning. We easily yield to the logic which bids us be

quiet, be still, refrain. He has the easy task in life who pleads with men to be less and to do less, to think less, read less and act less. He has the heroic part—the great hill to climb—who calls to reluctant travellers, “Excelsior!” who bids men whose eyelids are heavy with sleep rise and renew the fire, for the midnight hour is near and the temperature is falling fast. That is the position assigned to the Christian teacher, to the Christian apostle, to the father of the family, to Christian Churches, to every man and every institution assuming and employing the name of Christ. We might be better thought of if our appeals were less persistent and tremendous in mortal agony; but the time of judgment is not yet. Be it ours to escape the fate of people who have lamps but no fire, beliefs but no faith, a bound book but no revelation.

NOTES.

Q. Curtius, giving an account of the march of Darius's army, says: “The fire which they called eternal was carried before them on silver altars; the Magi came after it, singing hymns, after the Persian manner; and three hundred and sixty-five youths clothed in scarlet followed, according to the number of the days in the year.”—BURDER.

The first fire upon the altar came from heaven (chap. ix. 24), so that by keeping that up continually with a constant supply of fuel, all their sacrifices throughout all their generations might be said to be consumed with that fire from heaven, in token of God's acceptance. If, through carelessness, they should ever let it go out, they could not expect to have it so kindled again. Accordingly, the Jews tell us, that the fire never did go out upon the altar, until the captivity in Babylon. This is referred to (Isa. xxxi. 9) where God is said to have “his fire in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem.” By this law we are taught to keep up in our minds a constant disposition to all acts of piety and devotion, and habitual affection to divine things, so as to be always ready to every good word and work. Though we be not always sacrificing, yet we must keep the fire of holy love always burning; and thus we must pray always.—MATTHEW HENRY.

Leviticus viii. 33 ; ix. 1-8.

And ye shall not go out of the door of the tabernacle of the congregation in seven days, until the days of your consecration be at an end : for seven days shall he consecrate you.

1. And it came to pass on the eighth day, that Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel ;

2. And he said unto Aaron, Take thee a young calf for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before the Lord.

3. And unto the children of Israel thou shalt speak, saying, Take ye a kid of the goats for a sin offering ; and a calf and a lamb, both of the first year without blemish, for a burnt offering ;

4. Also a bullock and a ram for peace offerings, to sacrifice before the Lord ; and a meat offering mingled with oil : for to-day the Lord will appear unto you.

5. And they brought that which Moses commanded before the tabernacle of the congregation : and all the congregation drew near and stood before the Lord.

6. And Moses said, This is the thing which the Lord commanded that ye should do : and the glory of the Lord shall appear unto you.

7. And Moses said unto Aaron, Go unto the altar, and offer thy sin offering, and thy burnt offering, and make an atonement for thyself, and for the people : and offer the offering of the people, and make an atonement for them ; as the Lord commanded.

8. Aaron therefore went unto the altar, and slew the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself.

CONSECRATION AND SERVICE.

IT seems singular and almost frivolous that the priests were commanded not to go out of the door of the tabernacle of the congregation for seven days. This is our own practice. The accident has changed, but this is the philosophy of all calculated and well-set life. We think we have escaped all these mechanisms, whereas we have not escaped one of them. God is one, his method is one, his providence is one. Any variety which may please our little fancy is a very transient delight ; at the root and core of things there is a marvellous, an eternal unity. Men are not permitted to go forth into the

priesthood at a step. No priesthood is worth accepting that any fool may step into without notice, without preparation and without thought. The great priesthoods of life are all approached by a seven days' consecration. Men may rush at work, they may "rush in where angels fear to tread"; but looked at comprehensively and weighed wisely, the great philosophy covers all time that he who would accept any priesthood of life—by which is meant any of its highest offices, leaderships and utilities—must approach through a strait gate and go by a narrow way and obey the eternal law of consecration. This is not open to dispute; no theme of controversy is started by this suggestion. The practice of life is described almost literally even in this ancient text. There is no Old Testament in the sense of obsolescence or exhaustion; there is an Old Testament in the sense of root, origin, first points, germs, authorities. Without the Old Testament we could have had no New Testament, as without eternity time would have been impossible. Does the medical priest run into his priesthood without consecration? is he not hidden for many a day in the tabernacle of wisdom—in the tent in which he meets all the authorities of his science? For a long time he may not prescribe; for a considerable period he has but to inquire and to give proof of capacity and industry. A whole week of time—meaning by that some perfect period—must elapse before he goes forth authoritatively to feel a pulse, or to prescribe a remedy. Why this repetition of Old Testament technicality, of obsolete and most frivolous pedantry? There is no such thing. The Old Testament has a grip of life in all its departments and issues—which is proof enough that it never wrote itself. Does the musical priest rush into his work quite suddenly without notice or preparation, without consecration and endorsement? Allow that in some conspicuous instances which could never be encompassed by mortal law there may have been bushes burning in wildernesses without the enkindling of the fire by human hands; allow for genius, for almost divine fulness of inspiration; still there remains the great common law of education, progress and influence; and seven days' consecration, silence, study, inquiry, qualification must precede a forthcoming priest and the assertion of his power. The same law applies

to the preaching of the Gospel. The preacher must be long time hidden, during which no man may suspect that he is a preacher; his silence may be almost provoking; people may be driven to inquire what the purpose of his life is;—he says nothing; he never reveals himself; he looks as if he might be about to speak, but speak he never does; he is full of books and thoughts, and prayer seems to be written upon his transfigured face. What is the meaning of this? He is in the Tent of Meeting; he is in conference with the Trinity; he is undergoing consecration,—in no merely ceremonial sense: in the sense of acquiring deeper knowledge of God, fuller communion with the truth, and entering into closer fellowship with all the mysteries of human life. Even when he seems to be doing things that other men could easily do, it is the other men who are making the mistake. When the medical priest, hoary with long years, touches your pulse, remember that half a century is listening to the ticking of that life-pendulum; and remember that when any well-qualified critic pronounces an opinion in a moment upon any performance it may be half a century that speaks in the brief and urgent sentence. Our judgments are not to be founded upon the mere flash of the moment; behind what appears to be easy there may be a life-time of study, prayer, and consecration. What is true of all these regions is equally true of every other region in life that is worth occupying—true of every workman, however humble his sphere of industry, true of every head of a business that requires care and thoughtful management, true of every man who attempts wisely to direct public opinion; there must be preparation, consecration, waiting, silence, and then the outcoming of the prepared man to do the work which God means him to execute. Thus life is no little trick, no momentary posture, no empirical venture; but a deep philosophy, a grand tragedy, a tremendous struggle. O! that men were wise, that they understood these things! In all thy ways acknowledge God, and he will direct thy path. Do not run before being sent. Remember that time spent in the wilderness is not time wasted. Never forget that there is a religious silence as well as a religious utterance; and let God fix the time of consecration and the place of concealment, and

let him begin, continue and terminate the conference. After that all will be easy—not because of any frivolity in itself, but because of the divine store of strength treasured up in the prepared and consecrated heart.

“So Aaron and his sons did all things which the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses” (viii. 36).

Obedience is the best preparation for service. We cannot rule until we can obey. That was the motto of the great Napoleon. It is a philosophy expressed in the briefest terms. Aaron and his sons did not take a primary place; they did not rush upon their destiny; they waited, accepted the law, obeyed it to the letter, stood still like a commanded sun, and would not move until God bade them go forward. It is at this point that many of us lose much. We are impatient: we think we are prepared for action when we are not at all qualified to undertake it. The teacher knows better than the pupil; the master knows when we have been long enough in the wilderness or undergoing processes of spiritual education and religious chastisement. God is the time-keeper. To obey is to express in the form most suitable to modesty a spirit of genuine greatness. He who obeys, accepts discipline. To obey is to confess the power of others; to obey is to be willing to learn. How often is obedience masked! It has a look of complete surrender, though it is hooked and seamed through and through with subtle reluctance. In that case it is not obedience. None of the happy issues of obedience are secured by it; it is but a varied form of vanity, it is but a concealed expression of self-idolatry. The same rule holds good in Christian service. In the words of judgment we read, “Thou hast been faithful . . . I will make thee ruler.” The sense is even more clearly and graphically expressed by another word in the same judgment, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful . . . I will make thee ruler.” We should have more influence if we were more inspired by the spirit of obedience. Our word would go further if our character justified the assertion of our claim. It has come to a sad state when men undervalue what may be called, or rather miscalled, the negative virtues. We praise open heroism, military adventure, and in doing so we may

within certain bounds be perfectly right; but we should not forget patience, obedience, modesty, uncomplaining resignation, the eyes that are weary with long watching, and the lips that are sometimes tempted to move to profanation and yet are recovered suddenly and shaped in prayer. It is no mark of progress that we undervalue negative virtues, passive qualities, simple waiting until we are told to go forward. A meek and a quiet spirit is, in the sight of God, of great price.

The time came when Aaron was to go forward to his work. "And it came to pass on the eighth day, that Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel," and gave them their orders; and Aaron went forth and took the "young calf for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering." There is something very pathetic about a man's first action. We ought to look lovingly upon the young who try for the first time to realise the mystery of their vocation. It little becomes us to sneer. We ourselves, however old and skilled, had to begin. We should rather remember our own stumblings, and blunderings, and misadventures, and remembering these, should keep back the word of stinging criticism and bitter reproach, the utterance of which on the part of any man is an insult to the Spirit of Christ. Are any beginning the Christian race? We who are a mile or two on must pray that the new runners may run well; we remember where we slipped, where we well-nigh fell and should have fallen quite, but for friendly interposition and gentlest encouragement given by stronger men. He is not an able man who shows his ability in cynicism and in sneering. It is the curse of some families that they are always bitter. They mistake sneering for ability. It is the sting of a wasp, it is the fang of a serpent, it is the hoof of an ass,—it is not ability. Ability sustains, comforts, encourages, builds up with gracious edification and speaks the word of encouragement when heart and flesh do fail. We owe everything to encouragement—nothing to bitter cynicism. Encouragement was given in the case of the early priests.

"And Moses said, This is the thing which the Lord commanded that ye should do: and the glory of the Lord shall appear unto you." Duty and glory—not glory and duty—must be the motto

of life. Read the words,—ponder them: “This is the thing which the Lord commanded that ye should do:—” The sentence is punctuated by a colon; the thing is supposed to be done, and on the other side of the colon we read—“and the glory of the Lord shall appear unto you”;—harvest after seed-time, honour after service, heaven after earth, immortality after triumphant death.

Jesus Christ did all that is here ascribed to Aaron and his sons. Christ underwent preparation: for thirty years he was practically silent; he was being consecrated in a sense we cannot perfectly understand; he was being set apart, and in the end he brought all the completeness of his strength to bear in redeeming tenderness upon the awful situation of the world. He walked in long silence; no man dared ask him any question about his reticence. He might have spoken before—so human impatience reasoned; but he was fulfilling a destiny; he was representing the most solemn mystery of life. Christ obeyed. In saying so, we are abiding strictly by the Scriptural line; we are not venturing upon some idle or poetic fancy. He accepted the position: he “became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross”; as a Son he served in the Father’s house. Study this aspect of the divine character of Jesus; his Deity suffers no loss by this stoop of his humanity. He is not the less God to the soul, but the more, and the more priestly and the more sympathetic, that he understands all the bending, all the condescension, all the service of life. There is no work of a permitted kind to which the hand can be put which Christ did not do long before he commanded us to attempt its execution. Jesus Christ also had his first work. We read such words as these: “Jesus began to preach.” They are tender words; they touch the heart with a most subtle pathos. Christ, who never himself began—for he was Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last—“began to preach”—heard his own voice in public for the first time. What a beginning it was! How like a beginning when he began! He said “Repent!” It was a short discourse,—yes, in words, but a discourse that filled all time with its meaning. Then we read—“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee.” He who began to preach began to work miracles—did his first wonder. They say that to the true speaker the sentences he utters are greater

surprises to himself than to his hearers. Was the miracle greater to Christ than to the observer? Was there any element of surprise in the Redeemer's mind when he saw that the water had blushed into wine? We cannot tell. The human mind must wonder, and put reverent questions, and may do so without profaning sanctities divine. Have we begun? Have we begun to preach? Have we tried to do the first miracle? Have we never begun at all? It is high time to awake out of sleep: the night is far-spent, the day is at hand; redeem the time, buy up the opportunity,—begin now. One man's miracle may be the speaking of a gracious word, or the utterance of a forgiving declaration, or the offering of a hand long withheld, or the serving of the poor and the ignorant and those that are out of the way. Another man's miracle may be begun in opening his lips for the first time in audible prayer. Each man must find out for himself the point at which he must begin his preaching and his miracle. Christ associated duty and glory; he said—"I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do, . . . glorify thou me . . . with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." He, too, would be glorified. Moses finished the work, then the glory of the Lord descended; Aaron did the things that were commanded, then the glory of the Lord appeared; Jesus Christ finished the work which was given him to do, and the glory was not withheld,—a marvellous sentence; it seems to separate the coincident lines and divide them for ever.

"Aaron therefore went unto the altar, and slew the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself" (ix. 8).

There the scene ends. We look for analogies and consummations, but where is the analogous line in this instance? There is a sentence in the New Testament which makes us quail bearing upon this very doctrine. In the Epistle to the Hebrews (vii. 27), that sentence is recorded: "Who needeth not daily, as those high-priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself." All the meaning of that sentence no man may explain. Does it relate to the latter part of the previous sentence or to the entire declaration? Read again: "Who needeth not daily, as those high-priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this—" Which? ". . . first for his own sins, and

then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself." He was without sin, and therefore would need no sin-offering;—a Lamb without blemish or spot or drawback, he had no sin to confess; but when he was baptized he said ". . . thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness"; and when he was slain, what know I how much of his pure humanity was itself involved in the mysterious oblation? Silence is best. That he had no sin, he knew no sin, that he was spotless, pure, holy as God in himself we know; but representatively, humanly, fleshly, who can tell—for the exposition must put itself into the form of a question—the whole meaning of this ineffable mystery?

Thus stands the sublime appeal: a time of consecration, an act of obedience, glory crowning duty. To that programme of life and to no mean policy are we called, every one, by the Spirit of Christ and the vision of his Cross.

NOTE.

The order of God for the consecration of Aaron is found in Ex. xxix., and the record of its execution in Lev. viii.; and the delegated character of the Aaronic priesthood is clearly seen by the fact, that, in this its inauguration, the priestly office is borne by Moses, as God's truer representative (Heb. vii.).

The form of consecration resembled other sacrificial ceremonies in containing, first a sin offering, the form of cleansing from sin and reconciliation; a burnt offering, the symbol of entire devotion to God of the nature so purified; and a meat offering, the thankful acknowledgment and sanctifying of God's natural blessings. It had, however, besides these, the solemn assumption of the sacred robes (the garb of righteousness), the anointing (the symbol of God's grace), and the offering of the ram of consecration, the blood of which was sprinkled on Aaron and his sons, as upon the altar and vessels of the ministry, in order to sanctify them for the service of God. The former ceremonies represented the blessings and duties of the man, the latter the special consecration of the priest.

The solemnity of the office, and its entire dependence for sanctity on the ordinance of God, were vindicated by the death of Nadab and Abihu, for "offering strange fire" on the altar, and apparently for doing so in drunken recklessness. Aaron checking his sorrow, so as at least to refrain from all outward signs of it, would be a severe trial to an impulsive and weak character, and a proof of his being lifted above himself by the office which he held.

From this time the history of Aaron is almost entirely that of the priesthood, and its chief feature is the great rebellion of Korah and the Levites against his sacerdotal dignity, united with that of Dathan and Abiram and the Reubenites against the temporal authority of Moses.

The true vindication of the reality of Aaron's priesthood was, not so much the death of Korah by the fire of the Lord, as the efficacy of his offering of incense to stay the plague, by which he was seen to be accepted as an intercessor for the people.—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

Leviticus ix. 22; x. 1-7.

And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them, and came down from offering of the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and peace offerings.

1. And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer [not the appointed censer of the tabernacle], and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange [common or ordinary] fire before the Lord [in front of the holy of holies], which he commanded them not [the negative form is often used in Hebrew to express the stronger affirmative].

2. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord [by the same fire. Read 2 Cor. ii. 16, in illustration of alternative uses].

3. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake [an unrecorded law], saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me [I will sanctify myself in them that come near to me], and before all the people I will be glorified [and I will glorify myself before all the people]. And Aaron held his peace [silent assent, not sullenness].

4. And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel [the son of Kohath, and father of three sons] the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren [kinsmen] from before the sanctuary out of the camp.

5. So they went near, and carried them in their coats [tunics, long, white, sacerdotal garments] out of the camp; as Moses had said.

6. And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar [ordinary priests], his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes [give not way to such displays of grief as might reflect upon the providence of God]; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people [the connection between the priest and the people was representative and vital]: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled.

7. And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation [the entrance of the tent of meeting], lest ye die: for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moses.

BLESSING AND JUDGMENT.

A MOST happy change! We feel as if we could join the thankful and rapturous host of Israel. There has not been much blessing up to this period in our studies. We have come face to face with law, rule, exaction, discipline, and all the

apparatus of profound and life-long education. A tender tone would have helped us now and again. We have not been without such tone. When we have heard it, we have made the most of it; we have magnified the tenderness into a great heaven-filling benediction. We took it as preliminary; we interpreted it typically; we hailed it as an earnest; we said, "The cloud at present is only about the size of a man's hand, but quickly the sky will be charged with rain, and upon the earth it will plash in gracious benediction." This is the right way to read gentle providences—all light helps by the way; regard them as earnest, pledges, hints, and promises in substance. A great human passage is before us. Up to this time we have been dealing with priests, and ceremonies, and mechanisms; we have been conscious of the want of what may be represented as the universal; on every hand we have been bounded, shut up in stern iron, with a look upward, but no horizon. Now Aaron stretches forth his hands and blesses the people: stern Moses joins him: they enter the tent of meeting and return, and they both bless the people. The ministry is widening; there is a streak of light on the far-away horizon; the two greatest men have at present seen the possibility of millenniums of light and rest and comfort; a new tone is in their voices; feeling begins to enter into the ministry of law. The people may behave better after this. Who can rebel immediately after a benediction? Does not a blessing block us on our rebellious way and make us think a little whether we may not have been wrong, and whether it is not better to turn round and go the other—the upward—road? What has been wanting in our education, personally, domestically, socially, may be this element of feeling, sympathy, benediction,—this utterance of infinite hope, this covering up of wounds and blemishes and shortcomings and life-wanderings by a great and divine benediction. We seem to have sudden summer coming upon us in the winter-time of this law and mechanism.

Blessings of this kind do not come alone; other comforts attend and consummate them. We read in the twenty-fourth verse of the ninth chapter:

"And there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces."

It was a rare time in Israel—a time of rapture, of melting tenderness, of that sacred emotion which lifts up the level of the whole life by enlarging and ennobling all the best sentiments of the heart. This is what is now granted to men. All true service is glorified by a consciousness of the Divine presence. Again and again we say, “Did not our heart burn within us?” We knew hardly why; we had seen a Stranger: he had conversed with our inmost spirit: he had delivered messages straight to the hearing ear of the soul, every tone of which was heard, every tone of which was new; and the fire began to burn, and the heart became a new heart—soft, tender, filled with a sense of mystery: love rose above the region of words and shaped itself before the inner vision in apocalypses of symbol and type and wizardry such as might have been inspired by the Holy Spirit: and the air danced with new images, and the sun burned with new light, and all time seemed too short for the expression of the rapture which thrilled the spirit. Then we were charged with fanaticism; some did not hesitate to say: “These men are drunken; they have had new wine, and they are under the influence of intoxicants,”—not knowing that we were not drunken with wine wherein is excess, but were filled with the Spirit of God; and the only word in all the daily language of mortals which touched our experience at all, and gave it articulation, was the word *fire*, because it seems to hold all other words that mean earnestness, purity, elevation, beauty, suggestiveness. The fire in the humblest grate outshines the king’s diamonds. The fire, read by open and discerning eyes, is a continual history, battle, unfoldment, revelation.

There have been grand days in the Church—days when the mechanical priest has shaken off his mechanism and blessed the people; days when great legislators have dropped the bâton of statesmanship, and with free hands stretched out over a wondering people have blessed the common human heart. One may come in the ages who will sit down upon a mountain, and when he opens his mouth he will say, “Blessed, blessed, blessed!” he will begin his sermon by putting the crown upon all the best history of the heart; he will begin, where other men close, with congratulation and beatitude.

The history pauses a moment. It ought here to be punctuated by a whole century. Some time should elapse before the next sentence is read. Yet we had better not lengthen the pause, or we may sacrifice reality for poetical completeness. Our own life to-day is just as hurried, rugged, and contradictory as is this piece of ancient story. So we may come into the next chapter with an awful familiarity. Men can go from the altar to forbidden places; men can unclasp their hands from God's grip and put those hands into other keeping. Poetical justice might have closed the book of Leviticus with the ninth chapter. It would have been a glorious close,—Aaron moved to feeling: Moses giving way to emotion: the Lord's fire consuming the offering upon the altar: the people singing, shouting, and falling down in adoration. Why did not the history close there? That would have been Canaan enough for any nation, paradise enough for any people. But there *is* another chapter. The tenth chapter opens with a sketch of character which appears from day to day:

“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not.”

What a set-back in the grand advance! How often have we been within one step of heaven, and have turned suddenly round and fallen right back to the earth that has every reason to be ashamed of us! They were priests too; they were the sons of the pontiff. The evil began in the upper places. The scepticism is *in* the Church to-day. It pleases us to organise missions to those who are supposed to be unbelievers; but the unbelief of the day is *in* the Church. There is (as we have said again and again) no possible *unbelief* outside the Church. There may be ignorance, only partial knowledge, prejudice, perverted judgment; but, as we have again and again averred—and growing time becomes growing conviction,—the enemies of the Church are not outside the Church. The pulpit may be leprous; the ministry may be filled with scepticism. They were in the sacerdotal line, who blasphemously took their own censers,—a thing forbidden in the law. These men were not at liberty to take each his own censer; there was a utensil provided for that action, and for any man to bring his own ironmongery to serve in such a cause was to insult the Spirit of the universe. This

is how we stand to-day : every man bringing his censer—his own censer,—which means the prostitution of personality, the loss of the commonwealth-spirit and of the recognition of the unity and completeness of the Church. There are men who spend their time in amending Providence : Nadab and Abihu represent two such men to-day. There are men who are always trying to naturalise the supernatural : this is what Nadab and Abihu did. They said in effect, “This evil fire will do quite as well ; build your life on reason ; order all the ministry of your life by coherent and cumulative argument ; drop the ancient words, and choose and set new words of your own ; there is no supernatural : let us banish superstition and inaugurate the reign of reason.” Nadab and Abihu had a kind of church, but a church without the true God,—an uninhabited shell, a mockery, a base irony—the baser because it was in a sense religious. There are men who substitute invention for commandment. This is what Nadab and Abihu did : they invented a new use of the common censer ; they brought into new service common fire ; they ventured to put incense thereon when only the pontiff of Israel was allowed to use such incense ; they invented new bibles, new laws, new churches, new methods ; they were cursed with the spirit of extra independence and individuality, with the audacity of self-trust—not with its religious worship and adoration. This all occurs every day, and it occurs quite as rudely and violently in the current and flow of our own history. All this invention and all this deposition of God and of law comes just as swiftly after our conscious realisations of the divine presence as this instance came swiftly upon the conscious benediction of God. “There is but a step between me and death.” It would seem as if a universe might intervene between true prayer and the spirit of distrust and cursing—yet not a hair’s-breadth intervenes. A man on his knees is next to the worst self, namely,—a man with clenched fists defying the heavens. It is possible to lay down the Bible and take up the unholy book and read the corruptest pages with conscious interest if not positive sympathy. Thin is the veil which keeps the right action from the wrong deed. The place of devils is next door to the sanctuary always. For some men it is never so easy to rebel as after a great Amen spoken in the ear of Heaven.

Another action of fire is found in this incident:

"And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord" (x. 2).

The same fire! Is it not said that the Gospel is a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death? Fire had just consumed the burnt offering and the fat upon the altar in token of divine complacency and sacred nearness and the acceptance of human worship and that same fire went out from the Lord and devoured the audacious priests—the sacerdotal blasphemers,—ate them up as if they had been common bones! It is an awful flame! "Our God is a consuming fire." Priests, officers, leaders, men of position, men of wealth, play not your little fantastic tricks on God's altar! Your vanity and pomp and fashion and base wealth will be no protection against the anger and righteous judgment of God. The pulpit must obey; the foremost men must obey as the hindmost. The law must have obedience—simple, complete, honest, unquestioning obedience;—ours not to ask the reason, or make objection, or start new difficulty, or invent new methods; but to be found in loving and holy obedience evermore.

This is what has always happened in the history of such men as Nadab and Abihu. History is full of the white ashes of burned heretics. Leave the Lord to handle the infidel—whether he be priest or outside sceptic. The Lord has never been negligent of his own altar. Men have arisen from century to century proposing the use of new censers, granting to every man the use of his own censer—and thus paying a subtle tribute to the vanity of the human heart; in many ages men have arisen to write down the Bible, to tear down the altar, to supersede the sanctuary. For a time they succeeded; but because there was "no deepness of earth" they soon withered away—that is to say, they were not rooted in the Heart of the Universe, which is a living Heart, an eternal Heart; they were planted on the surface of things, and were in very deed quite green and gave promise of blossom and of fruit; but we looked for them; and, lo, they were not; yea, we sought them, but they could not be found. The Lord will burn every Nadab and Abihu, and burn them the more quickly that they were priests. If they had been sound heretics—really out-and-out enemies and assailants—he

might have conferred with Moses and Aaron about them as he conferred with an elder man about Sodom and Gomorrah; but he has no parleying when priests do wrong, for the evil is at the altar: there is nothing between the deed and the judgment. It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for preachers, teachers, professors, who have played the fool, and have substituted the traditions of elders for the commandments of God. It is a sad time in the Church when the altar is forgotten. The Lord said "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. . . . And Moses called" two of the family "and said . . . Carry out these men and bury them outside the camp"; and Moses would have no mourning by Aaron or Eleazar and Ithamar:

"Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled" (x. 6).

—but there must be no tears on the altar. We must not reflect upon Providence by crying in the church. It was the law that the priest should never leave the altar to go to burials, or interrupt his sacred ministry by shedding tears. He represented God as well as represented the people, and he must abide at his duty whoever died. It was military religion in its mechanical arrangement; it was spiritual obedience in the acceptance of its intention.

"Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar, and unto Ithamar . . . Ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" (the tent of meeting), "lest ye die: for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you"; if you go out you will reflect upon God's ministry in the world. Aaron must not mourn along the track of the divine judgment; he must remain at the altar; what may occur in his own heart none can tell, for God will not be hard upon him; but he must not be found going after burned men as one might go after those who had died complacently with Heaven and in the discharge of duty.

The reason is given in the words—"For the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you." That oil must separate between you and the appearance of unbelief; that oil is a restraint as well as an inspiration. Is it not so now, varying the terms and

the relations of things? If we could enter into the spirit of that restriction, what different men we should be! The name of your country is upon you: dishonour it not. A venerable name, never associated with meanness, cowardice, corruption, or fear of man. Rise to the dignity of the signature which is upon you. When *you* flee, the enemy will say your country has fled; when *you* play the coward, the enemy will say the throne has tottered and the sovereign has succumbed. The holy vow is upon you. You said you would be better and do better. You punctuated the vow with hot tears; your emphasis was quite an unfamiliar tone, so much so that we wondered at the poignancy of your utterance, and felt in very deed that you were speaking the heart's truth. Remember that vow. The vow of the Lord is upon you. If *you* stoop, it will not be condescension, it will be base prostration; if *you* palter with the reality of language, it will not be ability in the use of words, it will be the profanation of the medium which God has established for the conveyance and the interchange of truth. The exalted position is yours. You are the head of a family: if *you* go wrong, the whole family will suffer to the second and third and fourth generations. You are known and trusted in business: if *you* be found mean, untrustworthy, faithless, deceitful, the whole city will feel the anguish of a pang, for you were regarded as a trustee of its honour and its reputation. The anointing oil is upon you in some form or in some way. The name of Christ is upon us all. We cannot get rid of it. In this way or in that we have all to do with Christ, with his name, his honour, his cross, his crown. Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of Philistia rejoice. Who can tell what savage joy there is when Lucifer, son of the morning, trembles in his orbit—staggers—falls? The anointing oil of the Lord is upon you, and when the Christian professor speaks the base word, does the base deed, bends at the forbidden altar, withholds the sacrifice, forbears to speak the word of faithful testimony and allegiance,—the enemy laughs, and hell says: "Art thou also become as one of us?"

Leviticus x. 12-20.

12. And Moses spake unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons that were left [younger sons should learn lessons from the fate of the elder], Take the meat offering that remaineth [a handful had been burnt on the altar] of the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and eat it without leaven beside the altar [where the altar of burnt offering stood] : for it is most holy :

13. And ye shall eat it in the holy place, because it is thy due, and thy son's due, of the sacrifices of the Lord made by fire : for so I am commanded.

14. And the wave-breast and heave-shoulder shall ye eat in a clean place ; thou, and thy sons, and thy daughters with thee : for they be thy due, and thy sons' due, which are given out of the sacrifices of peace offerings of the children of Israel.

15. The heave-shoulder and the wave-breast shall they bring with the offerings made by fire of the fat, to wave it for a wave offering before the Lord ; and it shall be thine, and thy sons' with thee, by a statute for ever ; as the Lord hath commanded.

16. And Moses diligently sought the goat [the flesh of the goat (ch. ix. 15)] of the sin offering, and, behold, it was burnt : and he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron which were left alive, saying,

17. Wherefore have ye not eaten the sin offering [ch. vi. 28] in the holy place, seeing it is most holy, and God hath given it you to bear [to remove] the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord ?

18. Behold, the blood of it was not brought in within the holy place : ye should indeed have eaten it in the holy place, as I commanded.

19. And Aaron said [he acknowledged his responsibility, though he had not been personally accused] unto Moses, Behold, this day have they offered their [the people's] sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord ; and such things have befallen me : and if I had eaten the sin offering to-day, should it have been accepted in the sight of the Lord ?

20. And when Moses heard that, he was content.

PRIESTS AND LAWS.

“ **A**ND Moses spake unto Aaron,”—the people speaking unto the priest ! That is the eternal law in the true Church. The priest has no existence apart from the people. The people were represented by Moses ; the divine element was represented

by Aaron ; but Aaron was *only* a representative—living under criticism and judgment, and living only—so far as he lived truly—for the benefit and culture and elevation of the people. The Bible is the *people's* Bible ; it is not the Bible of a class, a priest, a man-made and man-ruled Church of a mechanical and formal type, separating itself from the universal instinct, and the universal need of the world. A grand chapter is opened in these words !—the people speaking unto the priest : the great-heart speaking to the momentary officer : the instinct of a world sitting, as it were, in judgment and righteous and generous criticism upon ceremonies and mediums and momentary arrangements, even though they were divine in their origin and most beneficent in their purpose. The people are always more than the priests. The people are always more than the princes. Kings are nothing but the blossomings of the social tree. Princes have no existence but for nations. This is a law not to be taught in one lecture, or to be brought home to the human mind in all its fulness and generous intent in violent harangue. Knowledge will secure this end ; the spread of wisdom will bring in “the parliament of man.” Meanwhile, no priest must dictate ; no prince must rule despotically. The people are the strength and the reality, the pith and the whole core of the nations. Moses must always speak unto Aaron. The pew must always speak to the pulpit, saying what its need is, telling the man how far he is speaking to immediate wants and to present necessities, or how far he is spending eloquent discourse upon people who are not in existence. Aaron must go down if he pray not mightily for the people. We cannot have any man continued amongst us simply because of his office. Office is nothing except it be associated with noble character, generous impulse, and divine vocation, and express the eternal thought of God. But this is an issue not to be hastened. Mechanical operation can do little or nothing here. Men must grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ ; and not knowing how the kingdom of the Son of man shall come in—the infinite theocracy—when no man shall be dragged down but every man shall be lifted up, and without fire or tempest or high wind rending the rocks, there shall be heard a still small voice saying, “He is come whose right it is.” Meanwhile, one sign of progress is that

the people shall take an interest in their priests, correcting them, rebuking them, cheering them, responding to them; when their prayers are offered, all the people shall say, Amen;—then prayer will be not merely official; then prayer will be unanimous; then prayer will mightily prevail.

“And Moses spake unto Aaron. . . . Take the meat offering,”—and he adds,—“for so I am commanded.” Moses was not the fountain of authority. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. This was not a clamorous interference with Aaron, an interference merely for the sake of tumult or the assertion of endangered right; it was the representation of a divine purpose and a holy command. This is an instance which shows how the law was looked after. Men make laws and forget them; they refer to statutes three hundred years old, venerable with the dust of four centuries, and they surprise current opinion by exhumations which show the cleverness and the perseverance of the lawyer. Men are fond of making laws; when they have ignoble leisure, they “improve” it (to use an ironical expression) by adding to the bye-laws, by multiplying mechanical stipulations and regulations, and forgetting the existence of such laws in the very act of their multiplication. God has no dead-letters in his law-book. The law is alive—tingling, throbbing in every letter and at every point. The commandment is exceeding broad; it never slumbers, never passes into obsolescence, but stands in perpetual claim of right and insistence of decree. It is convenient to forget laws; but God will not allow any one of his laws to be forgotten. Every inquiry which Moses put to Israel was justified by a statute; he said, “I do but represent the law; there is nothing hypocritical in my examination; there is nothing super-refined in my judgment; I am simply asking as the representative of law how obedience is keeping up step with the march of judgment?” We need such constables to watch the law and to be jealous for its observance and maintenance. Every age needs a grand constabulary force. The time will come when every man will be his own watch, his own critic and judge, and will require no external appeal; man shall not have occasion to say to man, “Know the Lord,”—for every one shall know him from the least to the greatest; universality of knowledge shall report itself in unani-

mity of obedience. God's laws are still alive, we have said; they are alive in nature; even could we sponge them out wherever they are written with ink, we cannot obliterate them as they form part of the very life and economy of creation. Fire still stings; the great sea will drown the vastest navy that ever trespassed on its waves if the laws which govern the ocean be not diligently obeyed—ay, almost to the point of idolatry; men who can use profane language to an invisible God must be up early and sit up late to watch the way of the sea. Thus, at some altar we are always bent: if not at this particular one, then at that. The profanest man is shamed into occasional reverence—bound like a coward at some altar which he would gladly escape. Nature looks after the execution of her own laws; she says to Moses and she says to Aaron and to all the children of men,—I am not mocked; you may mock my Creator, but I am not mocked; you cannot shorten one of my days, you cannot lengthen one of my sunsets, you cannot change the wind from the east to the west, you cannot drive on the procession of the seasons, or substitute one position for another in that serene and glorious march; you may mock my Creator; you may profane your speech by a misuse of his name; you may never look upward in pious wonder, not to say affectionate prayer; but I will not be mocked. So then, this boasted liberty, this magnificent freedom, is itself a caged bird, and the bars of the cage are of no flexible wand but of stiff and stubborn iron. We know we can blaspheme God, and we know that we cannot substitute spring for winter; we will be free and not pray, and we who thus spread paper wings fall down in stupid servitude before laws of ploughing, and sowing, and reaping—as obedient as the oxen that open the furrow. Every inquiry, therefore, which Moses made was founded upon a statute. The commandment of the Lord is everywhere.

“And Moses diligently sought the goat of the sin offering, and, behold, it was burnt: and he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron which were left alive” (x. 16).

But the flesh ought to have been eaten; a ceremonial law ought to have been observed. The two elder sons of the pontiff had been burnt, and the flesh of the goat of the sin offering had not been eaten, and Moses was angry. He does not name Aaron:

there is a gentle considerateness even in the "meek man's" anger; he will not have the pontiff abased in the sight of the people; he will blame the juniors. But there is an indirect blame that comes back with tremendous recoil upon men nameless who are involved in the responsibility. "And Aaron said unto Moses—" The younger men said nothing; they did not like the fire that burned in the face of Moses, a face soon made radiant either by communion divine, or by indignation because of violated law. So Aaron, recognising his own responsibility, made speech unto Moses. What is the answer to this ceremonial sin? A grand one! A perpetual one! Said Aaron, "Behold, this day have they offered their [the people's] sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord; and such things have befallen me": and there he sobbed. His two sons had been taken from him by fire: having the anointing oil of the Lord upon him, he was not permitted to go with the dead bodies, to see them buried outside the camp: he remained at his post; but his old heart was sore. We know the experience: still ploughing in the field, whilst a keener plough is ripping up the field of the heart! ". . . and such things have befallen me,"—I will not complain of the judgment: the young men were wrong: God was right: God's holy will be done! But I am a man; we could not eat the flesh to-day, our hearts were sore; if we had eaten the flesh, "should it have been accepted in the sight of the Lord?" The Lord knoweth our frame: he remembereth that we are dust; we know the law, the flesh would under ordinary circumstances have been eaten; but "such things have befallen me," my heart has been torn, my life has been emptied, a great judgment has stretched its black wings over my house-roof, and therefore the law has not been obeyed in the letter. It was a sublime answer; it was a father's explanation; it was a plea of instinct; it was old nature rising against temporary law, a larger law subordinating and for the moment suspending a smaller one. This is God's permission. This is the government under which we live. Instinct has its place in human education as well as ceremonial law, mechanical appointment, and transient stipulations. Aaron here supplies the "one touch of nature" which "makes the whole world kin." His plea holds good to-day. It holds good even in matters purely bodily. The sufferer "ought" to eat;

"But," he says, "such things have befallen me. I ought to partake of food, you are quite right in reminding me of the law; but such things have befallen me: I have just buried my dearest one; I have looked into the grave where my only child lies." Another says, excusing himself, "My child is twice dead: he is gone away, I know not where; I ought to eat and drink and sleep; but such things have befallen me." Thus one law modifies another. The deeper laws assert themselves against the more superficial statutes and ordinances. This plea operates in all social relations. Why was the wedding put off?—"such things have befallen me." Why was the feast postponed?—"such things have befallen me." The hands of the men were upon the bell-ropes, and in a moment more the metal in the belfry would have clashed out in song that would have made the city glad. Why was the belfry dumb?—"such things have befallen me." There are events in life which suspend the feast, which forbid the clash of the joy-bells, hung high in the air, almost eager to swing that they may speak their metallic music to the wondering town. We recall the card of invitation, and substitute it by a card black-edged, eloquent of grief, and in the presence of that dark margin explanation is unnecessary. God is not unpitiful: God is tender; he knows our frame; he says,—
"They are but children of the dust; their life is but as a vapour, which cometh for a little time and then vanisheth away; and their days are as a post: they fly quicker than a weaver's shuttle; their breath is in their nostrils." "His mercy endureth for ever." If our very prayer is choked in the throat by ungovernable sorrow, it may in its very off-breaking—in its very interruption—be a mightier prayer than if its eloquence had been rounded in the most resonant periods. We live under a merciful heaven. The sceptre is not of iron, and the hand that holds it is a gentle hand.

There is more in the twentieth verse than the mere letter: "And when Moses heard that, he was content." Some explanations carry their own conviction. We know the voice of honesty when we hear it; there is a frankness about it that can hardly be mistaken. But the meaning lies deeper: there can be no contentment in the presence of violated law. Where a law is

violated wantonly, nature can have no rest ; she says,—“ I cannot sleep to-night.” Thank God she cannot ! When she can forget her Maker, the end will have come in darkness, and there will in very deed, in spirit and effect, be no more any God. Law must be satisfied in one of two ways. Law can rest upon the ashes of Sodom and Gomorrah, saying,—“ Judgment has been inflicted, righteousness has been vindicated, and the seal of condemnation has been attached to the testimony of evil ” ; and mighty, imperial, inexorable law sits on the desolated cities—“ content.” That is not the way in which the Lord would bring about his own contentment ; still, there is the law : fall upon this stone and be broken, or the stone will fall upon you and you will be ground to powder. The Gospel is a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. God would have law obeyed : all his ordinances carried out in simple obedience, every statute turned into conduct, every appointment represented in obedience and praise. Then the universe, faithful to her Creator, the stars never disloyal to their Creator-King,—the whole creation, will say,—CONTENT.

Leviticus xi.

ANIMALS PERMITTED AND FORBIDDEN FOR FOOD.

IT appears from this chapter that laws were not bounded by local circumstances. In that one fact is a divine philosophy, and in that one fact there is a law which, if seized by us and applied to our daily life, will save us from infinite trouble. If the law had been bounded by local circumstances hardly one word of all this elaborate chapter could have been written. The animals that are permitted and that are forbidden had hardly any existence in the wilderness in which the immediate life of Israel was then being spent. The people might have said,—Why permit us to eat animals which are not at hand? Why forbid us to eat food which is not within our reach? Why, in a great desert, lay down rules and regulations about the fish in the sea? Why not confine legislation to immediate environment? That is the rude questioning of human ignorance and impatience. Men of impatient temper will insist upon limiting everything by the exigency of the immediate moment. What wonder if such men have no heaven, no immortality, no future, no sky above their little earth? The philosophy is the same all through and through. Here is the solemn lesson that we are to provide for all life, for all the possibilities of life, for all the yet unknown contingencies of life, as far as they can be forecast and ruled by inspired prudence. Thus in Leviticus we are called to larger life. A very few rules would have done for the local wilderness; the simplicity of the occasion rendered intricate legislation perfectly needless—made it, indeed, quite a burden of superfluity. But life is not all lived in one place; life is not bounded by one little day. It is not enough to look at the immediate point: we must endeavour to bring within our purview all possibilities and argue out the logic of our life upon broad bases, and be sometimes apparently losing our life that

we may in the issue the more certainly gain it. Beware of all extemporised law! The very fact of its suddenness deprives it of its dignity. There is no need to make laws under panic. Certain adaptations of law may have to be made suddenly; but the law itself—the abiding and substantial quantity—may be settled an eternity before any direct application becomes necessary. This is the meaning of predestination, foreknowledge, pre-arrangement. The Lamb was slain before Adam fell: sin was provided for before it was committed. The surprise was not in heaven: in heaven eternity rules in all its infinite serenity, its ineffable calm. The very hairs of our head are all numbered. We may easily be thrown into spasm and racked by keen surprise and troubled with many an unexpected tumult; but the Lord liveth in infinite peace; he knoweth the end from the beginning; in the wilderness he legislates for the city; in heaven he legislates for earth; it was in eternity that he settled the balances in which time's affairs were to be weighed and settled. Better take the long view; you will be saved from surprise and from the action which may be impaired or perverted by being called upon for instant and unprepared reply. So now in the little world of time men may settle their eternal affairs; even in this wilderness they can begin their heaven; close by the graveside they can sing hymns of immortality. There is no need for haste, or panic, or sore distress of soul, to those who have entered into the divine foresight such as is revealed in this chapter, and who from the beginning have, by the Divine Spirit, settled the issue of all life, and have anticipated and passed not only the bitterness of death, but the solemnity and sternness of judgment.

Suppose we deny the whole of the eleventh chapter of Leviticus, speaking of its pedantry, its frivolity, its unworthiness of a mind infinite and a sovereignty eternal,—suppose we erase the whole chapter—What then? Here, too, is a grand philosophy: deny the letter, yet there is the chapter as a spirit in the consciousness of every man. To destroy the merely literal chapter is nothing: we leave the fact behind. We *do* elect and we *do* reject. With what, then, do we quarrel? Simply with the paper and ink and shaped letter—with the law as impressed upon the record by iron. The frivolity, then, is upon our part. If Leviticus were

closed, we still turn away from some food with revulsion—from some suggestions with positive disgust; or we yield to other appetences and preferences as if borne towards them by a divine and gentle pressure. Of what avail is it to differ with the letter—to wonder whether the Eternal God would stoop to give directions about this animal and that animal in relation to human consumption—when there is written upon the very surface of life the same law, and we ourselves every day obey an instinct which, indeed, we find it all but impossible to suppress? This reflection would be stripped of most of its value if it related only to the matter of human eating and drinking; but even this suggestion touches the whole circle of human thought and the practical expression of the human will. We deny the supernatural; yet we obey. We all really confess the supernatural: some in solemn testimony well-argued and expressed with great precision of language: others in surprise, in fear, in cowardice for which no preparation had been made, in times of conscience rising to assert itself and making “cowards of us all.” It is possible to carry faith in the supernatural clear through the whole line of life; but who ever found it possible to have nothing supernatural through all the undulation and all the uncalculated variety of life? Who has not sometimes been suddenly blanched by what might have been a ghostly presence in the air? Who has not sometimes almost so faltered as to fall upon his knees in attitude of supplication? Who has carried reason, pure and simple, without horizon, without ghostliness, without fear, right through the whole quantity of life? I have never met that man. Though we quibble in argument about the supernatural, we obey; though we discuss in high controversy about faith, yet we live a faith-life, and cannot help it. The atheist walks by faith and not by sight. The very men who are quibbling about the place of faith in the development and education of the human race cease their quibbling that they may obey the necessities of the universe. We suggest objections to the doctrine of the innocent suffering for the guilty, and when we have closed our wordy fray we go out to do the very thing which we had just declared to be impossible: the debater illustrates the fallacy of his own argument. All through life the innocent are as a matter of fact suffering for the guilty: the son of man is

dying for the sons of men. The principle of vicariousness rules the whole economy of human development and progress. Our denials, therefore, are always but in terms: in our own life we re-affirm the doctrine which in our intellectual vanity we had questioned. Thus is God Master: even thus do circumstances make men theologians and force them into truth which they could never accept in merely formal proposition. Hence the axiom—for such it almost is, not only in its terseness but in its truthfulness—that “some men are better than their creed.” This is God’s interpretation of our life. Were he to be judging by our words, he could convict us of solecism and contradiction amounting to falsehood, and of irony amounting to profanity; but he looks upon the heart, and about many a man he may be saying, in effect,—“Poor soul! how he foams in argument, yet how noble he is in suffering! Poor half-wild creature! how he vexes himself by the misuse of terms, but how complete he is in patience! How he troubles himself about the philosophy of prayer—not knowing that the very sigh he heaves after his vexation is itself a noble cry to the Unseen and Infinite.” Thus many may come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and be made members of the kingdom of heaven who in mere words have been ranked among the opposition, the sceptical and those who have had no certitude of religious position and hope. Cheer your hearts, then, about your sons and your daughters! Lift up your heads, for you may not have lost from the Church so many as in your unworthy fear you had supposed. God is the Judge. Behind the denial in words he may find the confirmation in feeling and in action.

Judging by this schedule of regulations as to eating and not eating, it would appear that uses and values are not to be determined along one line only. Some things mentioned here are not to be *eaten*; yet they may be useful. The “not” is a very small limitation: it refers to one direction only. Some animals are to *be eaten*; yet they are not therefore to be despised. Who can foretell their destiny? eaten by the poet, they may become poetry; sanctified by the eater, they may be lifted into new significance. There is no one exclusive standard by which value is to be determined in these matters. This is a very wide law like the others. This man is not a scholar; but he is a genius; he has

no information, but he has inspiration. Do not misjudge him. The other man is not a genius, but he is a scholar ; he is useful : he abounds in knowledge : he can correct a thousand mistakes : he can direct life upon an upward road. We must, therefore, —such seems to be the spirit of the law—not confine our judgment to one direction or to another, but remember that as we are many members yet one body, so we in our higher relations represent a great diversity, yet a most solid and gracious unity. Let us be careful about these matters. This is the infirmity of the critic : that he can see in one direction only. The glory of the judge is that he takes in the whole case, balancing, distributing, arranging, and estimating the entire situation, with the calmness of wisdom and with the penetration of an upright and unbiassed mind.

A very popular argument is upset by this chapter. There is an argument which runs in this fashion : Why should we not eat and drink these things, for they are all good creatures of God ? The temptation of man is to find a “good creature of God” wherever he wants to find one. The doctor, yielding to human infirmity, permits, rather than sanctions or commands, certain little indulgences, and the receiver of the permission instantly turns the permission into a statute and commandment and seals it with the doctorial seal ! We are easily led in the direction of our preferences. All the animals in this chapter were good creatures of God, in the sense of having been created by the Almighty. “And these are they which ye shall have in abomination among the fowls ; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination : the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the ospray, and the vulture, and the kite after his kind ; every raven after his kind ; and the owl, and the night hawk, and the cuckow, and the hawk after his kind, and the little owl, and the cormorant, and the great owl, and the swan, and the pelican, and the gier eagle, and the stork, the heron after her kind, and the lapwing, and the bat.” Who made these ? God. Then are they not good creatures of God ? Possibly so ; but they are forbidden in that particular use. You do not depose the creature from any dignity to which it is entitled as a creation of God : you do but discern the right use and purpose of the creature in the intent of God. This argument must be applied by every man according to his own circumstances. The argument of the chapter does not end

in itself. What does end in itself? There are educational beginnings; there are points to start with. The argument is cumulative and becomes stronger and stronger as the instances are plied in illustration of its meaning. Is God so careful about the body and has he written no schedule of directions about the feeding of the mind? May the body not eat of this, but the soul eat of everything? Are there poisons which take away the life of the body, and no poisons that take away the life of the spirit, the mind, the soul? That is the chapter magnified by spirituality. This is an instance of how things may be made symbols of truth infinitely greater than themselves. It is impossible to believe that God, who takes care of the body, pays no attention to the soul. He who feeds the fowls of the air will feed his children is an argument we do well to reiterate, because we feel at once how true it is and gracious. Why not be consistent with our own reasoning? The very fact that God could take such pains in keeping us back from the use of such animals, begins the infinite argument that his anxiety is to save the soul from poison, corruption, death. "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" Let your soul delight itself in fatness; Wisdom hath prepared her feast: the viands are heaven-tasted and are all approved: sit down, eat and drink,—yea, eat and drink abundantly; there is no poison in the bread, there is no death in the pot, and the banner over the feast is Love. May a man eat lies,—may a man devour false teaching, and be none the worse for the meal which the soul has eaten ravenously? Has a man to be very critical and dainty about the food which his body consumes, and is he to sit down at every table spread for his intellectual satisfaction and to eat and drink whatever comes without exercising the spirit of criticism and discernment? It is an insult to reason to suggest a vanity so evident and so complete. You are particular about the cleanness of your body, and you are right; but being faithful to that daintiness you must go further and see that the soul is unspotted—pure as heaven's purity. You are most careful not to eat and to drink what will injure and disturb and unsettle you, or subject you to momentary inconvenience: so far you are right; but being right there, do not play the fool in the heedless satisfaction of your mind or in the glutting of your soul: beware what is offered for the spirit's

consumption—for the Lord has “no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” Bread of Life, feed me! Lord, evermore give us this living bread. We would eat of thy flesh and drink of thy blood, and so escape the tyranny and the bitterness of death. We would accept the hospitality of Heaven. We bless thee that thou hast saved us by instinct and by law from eating and drinking that which would injure us: now, Lord, give us the intuition, the inspiration, which will enable us to see in a moment what is false, what is impure, what is unworthy of our soul’s inner purpose, and having seen what is so unworthy, may we touch not, taste not, handle not, the unclean thing, but ever keep within our Father’s house, where there is bread enough and to spare.

NOTE.

It is noteworthy that the practical effect of the rule laid down is to exclude all the *carnivora* among quadrupeds, and, so far as we can interpret the nomenclature, the *raptores* among birds. This suggests the question whether they were excluded as being not averse to human carcasses, and in most Eastern countries acting as the servitors of the battlefield and the gibbet. Even swine have been known so to feed; and further, by their constant runcation among whatever lies on the ground, suggest impurity, even if they were not generally foul feeders. Amongst fish those which were allowed contain unquestionably the most wholesome varieties, save that they exclude the oyster. Probably, however, sea-fishing was little practised by the Israelites; and the Levitical rules must be understood as referring backwards to their experience of the produce of the Nile, and forwards to their enjoyment of the Jordan and its upper lakes. The exclusion of the camel and the hare from allowable meats is less easy to account for, save that the former never was in common use, and is generally spoken of in reference to the semi-barbarous desert tribes on the eastern or southern borderland, some of whom certainly had no insuperable repugnance to his flesh; although it is so impossible to substitute any other creature for the camel as “the ship of the desert,” that to eat him, especially where so many other creatures give meat so much preferable, would be the worst economy possible in an Eastern commissariat—that of destroying the best, or rather the only conveyance, in order to obtain the most indifferent food. The hare was long supposed, even by eminent naturalists, to ruminant, and certainly was eaten by the Egyptians. . . . As regards the animals allowed for food, comparing them with those forbidden, there can be no doubt on which side the balance of wholesomeness lies. Nor would any dietetic economist fail to pronounce in favour of the Levitical dietary code as a whole, as ensuring the maximum of public health and yet of national distinctness, procured, however, by a minimum of the inconvenience arising from restriction.—SMITH’S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

Leviticus xiii., xiv.

THE LAW OF LEPROSY.

THE thirteenth and fourteenth chapters are occupied with the question of leprosy. With that disease we have now, happily, nothing to do in this country; yet those who care to peruse the note at the end of this discourse will find that England was once ravaged by that terrible disease. It would be pleasant to turn over the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters, and to escape to subjects less revolting; but pleasure is not the law of life. It is here that so many men fritter away their days and altogether mistake the divine purpose of education. Men set up their "taste." When a man talks about his "taste," he has no taste to be proud of. Look at this large question in the light of religious history and human progress. What was to be done when leprosy was suspected? "The priest shall look." Would you hasten away from that great saying? Why that is the key of history. You would escape from the richest thought if you escaped from the fact that God has trained the human race from the religious instinct. Where was the doctor? There was no doctor then; he is a later creation. He came in due course and by pressure of necessity, having regard to the widening expanse of civilisation; but the priest was the doctor, —and the priest is the only true doctor in every age. "The priest shall look"? Why not confine himself to his own work? Why not stay within the church and do the priestly rites and ceremonies, and let the leper alone? No work is excluded from the priest. The priest has, indeed, lived downwards and backwards, and given up his heritage and his rights and properties, and has cut down his divine vocation with a ruthless hand; but, rightly interpreted, the minister of God is the doctor of the world, the musician of the world, the father of the fatherless, the leader of the blind, the great schoolmaster, the gentle unwearying

shepherd,—he is the son of man. He has allowed himself to be snubbed out of nine-tenths of his work ; he has permitted himself to be enclosed in a certain way, and to be shut up within certain boundaries and points ; but that is his blame—his apostasy in the Eden which includes the world—and if he has fallen into a little man, it is not because God's vocation was a limited call. The Church is the true lazaret-house ; the Church is the great hospital ; the Church is the dame-school, presided over by gentlest mother, who collects us all around her, and helps us in the spelling and building up and speaking out of words. But we have allowed the fool to prate over us and to tell ministers to confine themselves to their own work, as if they were artisans or specialists, not having right over all flesh, all history, all poetry, all music, all progress. The doctor is but *part* of the minister—a spark flashed out of the greater fire. The true priest—the seer, and interpreter—is the foremost man of the age : beyond him is One only, and that is God. In old history the priests were the doctors ; in our own history the priests are the leeches. What is the meaning of this ? The profound philosophy of it is, that it is from the religious point, or instinct, that all history is developed. We are told that of course in the early ages all learning was with the monks. That does not impair the proposition that has been laid down ; that circumstance rather increases the evidence of the truthfulness and cogency of that proposition. How did all learning come to be associated with the monk, or religious man ? The same philosophy is here. Life is associated with the religious instinct,—prying into all things, knocking at every door to have it opened, looking over every water and wondering what shores are lying beyond its waves. If religion has allowed itself to be shut up in some church cellar, religion, in its human relations, must blame itself. It was meant to stand on the mountains, to rule the nations, to lead every holy war, and to settle the tumult of the world into the peace of heaven. The largeness of the religious responsibility continues. The Church is responsible for the ignorance of the world. Do not blame the State—a poor little machine, a shed run up in the night-time for protection against the weather. The Church is responsible for every man this day that does not know the name of Christ, the claim of God, the

holiness of honour, and the duties of civilisation. The Church is responsible for every child that cannot write its name. But the Church has fallen upon small ideas, little comforts, seventh-day indulgences, half-day hearings, and these marked by extreme reluctance or spoiled by pedantic criticism. The heroic conception—the vocation to seize the world, arrest it, fight its enemies, shut up its hell—has been misinterpreted or forgotten. Read history, and be just to the religious instinct. It is easy to see where civilisation, having entered into elaborate redistribution of offices and positions, may have forgotten its original obligations: it is easy for a man to forget at whose torch he lighted his own; but search back through the days and nights of history, and you will find that the first torch was kindled by the hand of God. We soon become forgetful; it is easy to drop into the spirit of ingratitude. We may look at the sky until its very blue becomes commonplace.

All this care, outlined with so complete an elaboration, was not meant for the sake of the individual alone,—it contemplated the protection of the whole body of the people. Why this anxiety about a man who shows signs of the plague? For his own sake, certainly; but largely for the sake of the uncontaminated host. The man was to be put outside the camp or to be shut up in a dwelling of his own: for a period he was to be cut off from his people and made to live a solitary life. Did the priest order this punishment with the view of afflicting the poor sufferer himself? Unquestionably not; the priest had no wish to add solitude to pain, exile to defilement. The priest represented the spirit of compassion—soft, tender, healing pity; but it was the large pity that not only looked at the sufferer himself, but regarded the unnumbered hosts who might be affected by the defilement of the leper, were the leper permitted to sustain his customary relations. “No man liveth to himself.” The camp was afraid of contagion. Save the untouched by expelling the defiled. Look at the precautions taken by ourselves in case of disease: how we publish the names of affected neighbourhoods; how we protest against the erection of buildings appropriated to endeavours to cure certain malignant and infectious diseases; how we blanch under the intelligence that cholera or small-pox has threatened an invasion of the country. What anxiety! What endeavours to

prevent the ravages of the disease! All this is right; but it throws into tremendous and appalling contrast our carelessness about the contagion that poisons the soul. There is a moral contamination; there is a mental defilement. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." We do not know what evil we are working by the subtle influence of contagion. It is not needful for the infected man to go and deliberately touch the unaffected man, as if by an act of violence: we spoil the air. We drop a word and think no more about it; but that word is working for evil in the soul of the youth who heard it; we indulge a jest which hides impurity, and the impurity works when the jest is forgotten; we throw out a suspicion, and pass away as if we had done no wrong,—better fill the air with poison and kill a thousand men a day than unsettle the soul's faith, trouble the moral confidence, risk the eternal destiny of men. Why are we not consistent with our own logic? Why do we not complete our own view of cleanness? Any man who can content himself with external purity is not a pure man; he is a trickster, a mechanician, a man who attends to externals. Only he is clean in the flesh who is clean in the spirit. You cannot wash a man with an unclean spirit to any effect, even in the flesh; the evil oozes through the burnished skin; the iniquity comes through every pore. What we should look after is moral consistency. We are anxious to shut out a disease that would kill the body, and yet open all the doors and all the windows and let in the diseases which infect and poison and damn the soul. Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee!

It is interesting and instructive to note that the pure man can alone deal effectively and harmlessly with corrupt and pestilent subjects. This lesson can never be taught to some minds. The priest represented purity; we have seen what pains have been taken to purify him, to sanctify him, and consecrate him; we have been present in all the process, and now the priest ideally represents purity, divine holiness. We have no instruction to the effect that one leper is to look on another; the distinct direction is that the priest—the holy, pure man—shall look at the leper—handle him, undertake him. Send the holy to the unholy; send the Christ of God to the sinners of the earth:

he has "gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." Religious men should take up all bad questions ; but they will not. The mischief is that such men should take upon themselves the responsibility of representing the kingdom of God. Why are not *they* infidels, if we must have infidels upon the earth for a time ? I should turn all the imperfect and misinterpreting professors of Christianity into infidels, for such they are, and they are such of the very worst type. The Church is burdened with men who do not understand the genius of the kingdom of heaven. When our holiest women are found in our unholiest places, know ye that the kingdom of heaven is at hand : the day is dawning ; the sweetest wife we have is away seeking the piece that is lost. But she will be defiled ? Never ! She will be exposed to danger ? No ! Not when the theologues have balanced their wordy battles and foolish misunderstandings, but when the holy lives are sitting down with lives unholy, will the orient whiten and the day dawn, and Christ "see of the travail of his soul." It is no sign of piety to turn away from revolting subjects and to say,—We cannot enter into this because our taste is offended, and our feelings are shocked. Whoever says so is a knave in the Church ; he has no right to sit down where Christ sits ; he is worse than Iscariot ; he is a traitor for whom no death has been devised sufficiently awful. These people abound on every hand ; they are the plague of society ! Raise a very evil report about a man : make it very bad : spare no charge : enlarge the accusation until it takes in all things revolting, shocking, and instantly nearly all the pious people you have ever known will leave the man because the accusations are so shocking. Accuse him of some trifling violation of etiquette, or propriety, and twenty men may be willing to share his fate, or abate the force of the social blow that is aimed at him ; but make the accusation bad enough : especially introduce into it elements of obscenity, and you will hear so-called Christian people say that they have no wish to enter into subjects of that kind. The very people who ought to say "What are they ? when did they occur ?—let the witnesses stand up"—will speak of their taste and their sensitiveness, and the delicacy of their bringing-up, and will abandon the man. *Those* people are the infidels. Do not believe—I speak to inquirers as to the extent of the divine temple and the

meaning of the divine kingdom—do not believe that wordy opponents are the infidels; those are the infidels who profess to know Christ, and yet know nothing of the infinite pity, valour, nobleness, and deity of his spirit. Let the priest look on the man accused. The priest must never be afraid. The priest must enter the house where small-pox is, or leprosy, or cholera; let others cry fear if they will—the priest resigns his priesthood when he resigns his courage. Christ was holy, harmless, undefiled; yet he was the Guest of sinners, he received sinners, he ate and drank with sinners, he spake to sinners as never man spake; to the lost woman he said,—Sister, begin again.

Men turn away from the perusal of such chapters, and look complacently upon moral leprosy. Men who would walk a mile to avoid an infected house, will read the very last book that the devil has published, and allow the devil to cut the pages for them; men who are so dainty that they could on no account pass by certain hospitals, have in their libraries books that poison the soul; men who would be alarmed if they knew that their children were exposed to companionship with children who have the *whooping-cough*, will tell lies by the hour;—pitiable men! shameful men! Men who would not allow any child of theirs to look upon a drunken man, will allow their children to hear themselves speaking evil of their neighbour all day long. What inconsistency! what irony! But this is the difficulty of Christ: that whatever is objective, tangible, and fleshly, has, by reason of its substance, an advantage over the moral, spiritual, invisible, and immortal. The conduct of men is not always against God only, it is against inward honour, conscience, moral right, spiritual sensitiveness; the atheism is not a speculation which challenges the heavens, it is a practice which embitters the fountains of life.

Read the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Leviticus through without stopping, then read Jesus Christ's cure of leprosy, and compare the two. The leper said: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. . . . I will"—and the man was cleansed. "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us"; and Jesus said,—“Go show yourselves unto the priests”; and as they went the burden fell off, and they stood up in the purity and suppleness of renewed youth; one soul was so filled with gratitude that he went back

to bless his Benefactor. You can hardly have a more striking instance of the difference between the ancient ritual and the Christian dispensation than by reading the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Leviticus, and then reading in immediate connection the history of the cure of leprosy by Jesus Christ. We are all afflicted with leprosy; the disease is within. Jesus Christ is within our cry: we can now make him hear: let each say with an honest heart, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean; create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me," and we shall escape all this elaborate ritual, all this exclusion, and separation, and purification, and at a word—the creative, redeeming word—we shall stand up clean men, pure souls. "*Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.*"

NOTE.

Many imagine leprosy to be some obscure disease alluded to only in the Bible. Leprosy was also a disease of the Middle Ages, more widely spread and more fearful in its results than any other in ancient or modern times. It is probable that the worst form of leprosy in early Jewish history was that now known as *elephantiasis*. The milder form of Jewish leprosy, called *bohak*, was neither severe nor contagious.

Leprosy in England and Europe arose gradually after the destruction of the Roman Empire, as fast as barbarism spread with its uncleanness of personal habits, and its resort to animal food and beer as nearly exclusive articles of daily diet. In all ancient towns it was early found necessary to erect hospitals and retreats and churches for those afflicted with leprosy. We have in England, now, hospitals built for lepers, so ancient that their origin is unknown, such as the St. Bartholomew Hospital at Gloucester, and others. It is known that there were at least 9,000 hospitals in Europe for leprosy alone. Louis VII. of France left legacies to over 2,000 hospitals for lepers in his country. We have extant a touching account of a knight of vast wealth and influence, named Amiloun, expelled from his castle to be a beggar, almost in sight of his vast possessions and stately home; for the Normans in France virtually outlawed, as well as expelled from their homes all lepers, and, as soon as their influence was established in England, they extended their sanitary measures and benevolent enterprise to lepers.

Hugo, or Eudo Dapifer—the steward for William the Conqueror—having received from him vast possessions of land in Essex, built or rebuilt, and endowed a St. Mary Magdalen Hospital for lepers in Colchester. The hospital for lepers, dedicated to the same saint, in the city of Exeter, is of unknown antiquity. Bartholomew, bishop of that city and diocese (1161-1184), finding its usefulness limited for want of funds, and the sufferings of lepers unlimited, endowed it with considerable wealth. He gave it for ever

five marks of silver yearly—the tenth of a certain toll, and the profits arising for ever from the sale of the bark of his wood at Chudleigh. His example stimulated the chapter of St. Peter's, in the same city, to grant a weekly dole of bread for ever. The good bishop Bartholomew wearied the Pope to give a charter to the hospital, making the endowment an everlasting benefaction, as he viewed the curse of leprosy to be as wide-spreading as humanity, and as lasting as the race of man. But he died before his wishes were gratified. However, Pope Celestine III. granted or confirmed a charter in the year 1192, and the charity exists to this day.

Hubert, Archbishop of Canterbury, held a synod at Westminster, in the year 1200, to carry out the decree of the Council of Lateran (1172), to build a number of churches solely for leprous people, for they had long been expelled from all parish churches. They were to have priests, officers, and graveyards exclusively for themselves. They were released at the same time from all claims for tithes for their land or cattle. So careful and determined were our ancestors to remove from sight and smell every leper, that a law was early in existence to enforce their removal out of towns and villages "to a solitary place." The writ is in our ancient law-books, entitled *De Leprose Amovendo*, and it is fully stated by Judge Fitz-Herbert in his *Natura Brevium*. King Edward III., finding that, in spite of the old law, leprous persons were concealed in houses inhabited by other persons, gave commandment to the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs to make proclamation in every ward of the city and its suburbs, "that all *leprous* persons inhabiting there should avoid within fifteen days next," etc., etc.

At the city of Bath, a bath, with physicians and attendants, was endowed—exclusively for lepers—and the endowments are still paid. That the bath was occasionally efficacious, in connection with improved diet, we have sure evidence; for one leper in late days had fixed to the bath a mural tablet to say that "William Berry, of Garthorpe, near Melton Mowbray, in the county of Leicester, was cured of a dry leprosy by the help of God and the bath, 1737."—GIBSON WARD.

Leviticus xxiii. 44.

“And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of the Lord.”

PLEASANT MINISTRIES.

THE principal Jewish festivals were, the Feast of Passover or unleavened bread; the Feast of Pentecost; the Feast of Weeks or of the harvest, or of the day on which were offered the loaves made of the new wheat; the Feast of Trumpets, called by the Jews *New Year*; and the Day of Atonement, or the Great Sabbath; the Feast of Tabernacles or the Ingathering of the Harvest. Owing to the difficulty of travelling no festival was appointed for winter; there was one in the spring, one in the summer, and four were appointed for the autumn. The feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles were called pilgrimage festivals, and were of a doubly joyful character, commemorative of national events and relating to the blessings of the seasons and the land. Besides the great annual feasts there were more occasional festivals, as, *e.g.*, the weekly Sabbath, the feast of the new moon, the Sabbath year, and the year of Jubilee. With these festivals in their local setting we have nothing to do; our business is with the perpetual truth which glows in the terms, “And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of the Lord.” What a change in his great ministry! Never was man charged with the delivering of so many disciplinary and legal words. It is time that he had something to say with easier music in it, conveying a pleasanter appeal to the imagination and the whole attention of Israel. It was a new mission. The lips of Moses must have grown hard in the delivery of hard speeches. It was his business always to deliver law, to recall to duty, to suppress revolution, to command and overawe the people whose fortunes he humanly led. What wonder if the people dreaded his appearance? That appearance might have

been equal to a new Sinai, a new Decalogue,—a harder speech of law and duty and servitude. It was a pleasant thing for Moses, too, this change in the tone of his ministry; he is now speaking of feasts, of festivals,—times of solemn rejoicing,—yea, some of the very feasts which were instituted were designated by names the roots of which signified to dance and be glad with great joy. An awful fate for any man to be merely the legal prophet of his age! A most burdensome mission always to be called upon to rebuke and chastise, to suppress, and to put men down to their proper level, and call them up to their proper obedience! Thus the Lord varies the ministry of his servants. He says, There will be no utterance of new law to-day, but this very day shall be a day of feasting and music and dancing; he will have a home in the wilderness—a glad, warm, happy home: all troublesome memories shall be dismissed and one overmastering joy shall rule this festal day. That is the speech he has been longing to make; but we would not let him. He never wanted to make any other speech; we ourselves forced the hard terms from his reluctant lips. A complete ministry is terrible and gracious. It is terrible by the necessities of the case. Consider the nature with which the ministry of heaven has to deal: “there is none righteous, no not one”; we have turned aside from the right way and are far from the centres of light and rest and peace; sometimes nothing will reach us but fear, terror, awful denunciation of anger, and judgment. Our mother tongue would be deficient of one instrument which alone can touch some men, were we to remove from that sweetest tongue the word “perdition,” or the word “hell.” We do not want it: we avoid it when we can; we would not set it in our eloquence, or weave it into our music, or use it upon any occasion if we could possibly do without it; it is a word which is used in reply to infinite provocation; he who has pleasure in the use of it knows not its meaning; he who declines its use altogether knows not the mystery of the nature which he has undertaken to reclaim and educate. Paul said, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.” The apostle used terror as an instrument of persuasion: not to keep men away from God, but to draw them near to the Father. That is the right use of all solemn terms and fearful judgments, all

burning fires, all unutterable and infinite threatenings,—namely, to bring men to consideration, to penitence, to newness of mind. But the ministry is also gentle : there is no gentleness like it. The true ministry of Christ is marked by surpassing and ineffable grace : its eyes are full of tears ; its great trumpet-tones are broken down by greater sobs ; it pities the weak ; it speaks a word of hope to the fallen ; it tells the farthest off that there is time for him to get home before the nightfall, or if he be overtaken with the darkness the light will be in the house he has abandoned ; it pleads with men ; it beseeches men to be reconciled to God ; it writes its promises in syllables of stars ; it punctuates its speech with fragrant flowers ; it breaks down into the omnipotence of weakness by clinging to the sinner when all men have abandoned him in despair. We must establish a whole ministry. The mountain must have two sides : the side where the darkness lingers ; the side where the light plays and dances in many a symbolism. This is human life. The two sides must go together. When the ministry thunders its law, it must be upheld ; when it breaks down in tears over the Jerusalem that has rejected it, it must be regarded as the very heart of God.

Notice the time when the feasts were spoken of. Let us regard the very position of the text as instructive. We have now read up to it ; beginning with the bondage in Egypt, dwelling tearfully and sympathetically upon that pagan servitude,—watching the children of Israel led forth by a mighty hand, we have noted the discipline which afflicted them educationally ; by this time we have become familiar with their hardships,—now it is a welcome relief to the reader to come upon festival, dancing, joy, delight,—one touch of heaven in a very wilderness of desolation. This is the day we have longed for. There was a hope hidden in our hearts that, by-and-by, golden gates would swing back upon happy places and offer us the liberty of heaven. We have come to that Sabbatic time ; now we are in times of jubilee and Sabbath, release, pardon, rapture,—praising God all the time, having found a temple without a roof, a sanctuary without a wall,—an infinite liberty vast as the Being which it adores. This is a picture of life wisely ordered. It is a pity

when any life begins with the feast. It is sad to see pampered children. What can make the wise man's heart sorer than to see children whose every want is anticipated, who have no burdens to carry, no darkness to fear, no enemy to grapple with? It makes the spirit sad! The student of history knows what a fate awaits those fair children—those sweet little ones. Every life must have its battle-field. The devil never allowed any soul to pass through without having to fight every inch of the way. Blessed are they who had their bondage first—their hard toil in the first years of life, when they went home to a fireless grate, and sat down in the very midst of desolation; when every wind was a ghostly threat; when the morning brought but a variety of darkness; when the night came with new terrors and alarms. Blessed are they who fought early and got the battle over soon; they had a hard struggle: they were struck on one side of the head and on the other, and thrown down by invisible hands; but they dashed the tears away, or burned them in the fire of new courage, and stood up again like men. "It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth." A terrible indictment is being written against people who imagine they can invert the purpose of Providence and rule life by new tricks in confectionery and pampering. Who are the strong men in the city, in the market-place, in any department and sphere of life? The men who carry scars and wound-marks—signatures of early battle, medals which testify that they met the foe and flung him in mortal wrestling. Who are the weak and the frail and the useless—those who are but shells painted in colours that will not stand the wear and tear of life? To that inquiry no answer in words need be given. God's plan is to train us for the feast. Who enjoys the feast? Not the sated appetite, not the cloyed palate; but the labourer from the field; the soldier who unbuckles his military robe and throws down his weapons with a soldier's heartiness; the man who has been out in the long wet night; the traveller who has just come to the summit of the hill; the pilgrim who brings with him all the fresh wind, the keen air of night, and the toil of a long ascent. Set down these men, and their very look is a benediction, their very way of eating is itself a religious expression. This feast has been in the divine view from the very beginning: God has

always meant hope, feasting, dancing, joy, liberty. Let us repeat, for our soul's profit, that all things contrary to these have been of our own invention, or have been necessitated by our evil behaviour. "God . . made man upright ; but" men "have sought out many inventions." Let us leave ourselves in the divine hands ; at the last, gathered around the table of God, spread by his hands, every guest shall say, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now."

Notice whose feasts they were, and how joy is ennobled by solemnity. "And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of the Lord." They were not fools' revels ; they were not inventions even of Moses and Aaron ; they were as certainly divine creations as were the stars that glittered above. The highest joy is always touched with melancholy. It has been said that laughter and tears lie close together ; singular is that, but most true to our own consciousness and experience. We sigh at the wedding. There is so much joy and gracious hilarity, that he is supposed to be criminal to the genius of the occasion who utters one word of gloom ; but the hearing ear has detected, in father or mother or friend, the sigh that meant it all. At the funeral we quote words that should make the face one broad and gracious smile ; we feast at the grave side : the promises never eat so well, with so keen a relish on the part of the eater, as when the soul really feels its need of divine sustenance and inspiration. Did the Lord make feasts ? He may have done so. Is "feasts" not a word too frivolous to associate with the name of the Lord ? No. If we are to judge by analogy,—No. The God of flowers may be the God of feasts. We know the flowers are his ; we know that no Solomon has ever arrayed himself in equal beauty ; he who made those flowers *must* have made a feast somewhere, a feast of reason, a feast for the soul, a luxury for the inner taste, an appeal to the larger appetency. He who made the birds may surely be the God of the soul's music. The birds sing so blithely, without one touch of vanity ; so purely, so independently, without pedantry, without sign or hint of human education ; the God who set their little throats in tune may surely be the God of all pure music,—the mother's broad laugh over her little one, the father's tender voice in the presence of distress and need ; and he who made the birds' throat may have put it into

the mind of man to make the trumpet, and the cornet, and the flute, and the harp, and the sackbut, and the psaltery ; they *may* be his judging by the happy analogies of nature. He who made summer, may have made heaven ! There is but a step between them. When Summer is at her best, what wonder if she should think herself sister of the blue heavens ? She is certainly lovely, nothing wanting in the completeness of her beauty : here so lofty and stately, there so pendent and graceful, yonder so fragrant and odorous as if with messages from paradise, and elsewhere so blithe and warm and gentle, climbing up in woodbine to the sick child's little chamber, and uttering messages of hope to the mother's heart, bidding all invalids come out and enjoy the feast. Whoever made that summer *must* have made a heaven ; standing in the summer meads, walking through the summer gardens, loitering by summer streams, watching summer heavens, it is easy to sing—

“There is a and of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign ;
Infinite day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain.”

No other hymn would suit the music of the time !

The gospel is a feast. Jesus Christ makes his kings spread feasts and issue large invitations, and when the mighty and the proud and the grand will not come, he sends men out into the highways and the hedges to bring in the traveller, the beggar, the homeless one. To Christ's feast all are invited ; no exception can be made. Yet there are exceptions : the Pharisee, the self-righteous man, the critic of other people, is forbidden ; Christ will have no cold souls at his banqueting-board—none there who imagines he is conferring patronage upon God. Man cannot patronise the Church. The Church may have so debased herself as to accept patronage ; but therein she has been disloyal to the divine call. Ho, every one that thirsteth,—whosoever will, let him come ; the Spirit and the Bride say, Come ; let him that heareth say, Come. The great invitation is issued from end to end of the Gospel message, and if we turn to it a deaf ear, the result is hunger, pining, wasting,—death ! This feast never cloy. All other feasts bring their own ending ; even the glutton says, with a porcine voice, “No more” ; the voluptuary and the

sensualist withdraw themselves from the feast by which they have been sated ; but in the feast of wisdom, in the banquet of grace, there is no satiety. "Doth not wisdom cry ? and understanding put forth her voice ? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors. Unto you, O men, I call ; and my voice is to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand wisdom : and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart. Hear ; for I will speak of excellent things ; and the opening of my lips shall be right things." "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars : she hath killed her beasts ; she hath mingled her wine ; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens : she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither : as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled."

A gracious voice ! a glad, grand gospel ! If hitherto ye have been living amid the sounding of law, the utterance of decree,—if, up to this moment, ye have been trembling under the sight of the rod and in the presence of gleaming judgment, know ye that now the feast of the Lord is declared, and whoso is shut out is self-excluded !

“HANDFULS OF PURPOSE,” FOR ALL GLEANERS.

“And the Lord called unto Moses.”—

LEVIT. i. 1.

The calls of Providence.—Their number and variety.—Every man is conscious of a call to higher life and duty.—Account for it as we may, there is an inward voice alluring us in one of two directions.—The voice of the Lord is not the only voice that addresses human attention.—The devil speaks as well as God.—The two voices can be easily distinguished by any earnest hearer who is determined upon doing the right deed.—There are appeals addressed to self-interest and self-indulgence; these are the appeals which are never made by God.—There are also appeals addressed to selfish cleverness and ingenuity, showing how prosperity can be secured or how personal interests can be advanced; such appeals need not be long considered as to their moral value: they bear upon them the stamp of an evil genius.—God's calls are always in the direction of self-sacrifice, beneficence, higher and higher holiness.—God calls through circumstances; through convictions; through the spontaneous action of friends of solid character; we are called upon to beware of every allure-ment that does not point in a distinctly lofty direction.—God calls to deeper study of the Word.—God calls to beneficent activity on behalf of others.

—It is a deception of the enemy to suppose that we cannot always distinguish the voice of the divine. Whilst that may be true enough as to certain practical details which are so inter-mixed as not to admit of special moral valuation, it is absolutely false in all matters involving conscience, sacrifice, and loyalty to truth.—The man who wishes to hear the divine voice must cleanse his ears of all worldly noises. These noises often constitute so many prejudices, through which, if the divine word is heard at all, it comes without emphasis and without authority. “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”—We should hear more divine calls if we listened more attentively.—If God has ceased to speak, therefore, it may be only because we have ceased to listen.—Nature says nothing to the unsympathetic man.—Art delivers no message to eyes that are filled with mean objects.—The speech often depends upon the hearer.—The supreme prayer of life should be: Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.

“Without blemish.”—LEVIT. iii. 1.

This qualification occurs again and again in the designation of sacrifices, and is therefore of supreme importance.—This call for the ideally pure is itself an instrument of discipline.—

Where can we find that which is absolutely without blemish?—Even where we cannot find the ideally perfect we are bound to look for it, for the very act of looking for it trains the attention to true criticism and the conscience to moral exactness.—The sacrifice was not to be almost blameless; or as nearly perfect as possible; it was to be without blemish.—God has always been calling for this description of sacrifice.—Can we find it in ourselves? Experience emphatically says No.—The more we know ourselves the more conscious we are of blemishes, not always visible, indeed, but not the less blemishes that they are invisible to public eyes, and sometimes almost invisible to ourselves.—Let a man examine himself.—All this inquiry for the ideally perfect points to a certain issue.—Not until Jesus Christ himself appeared was it possible to secure a perfectly blameless sacrifice.—He was without sin. He knew no sin. He was the just sacrificed for the unjust.—Sometimes we have to wait long for the explanation of profoundly spiritual terms.—An ideally perfect lamb of the flock or bullock of the herd was simply impossible, if only for the reason that the sentence of death was in every one of them.—The blemished can never give birth to the unblemished.—There is an hereditary taint in all living things; not, of course, a moral taint in all cases, not the less, however, a taint or a fault.—The blemished offered for the blemished is a mere mockery of law and divine claim.—The whole merit of the work of Christ turns upon his absolute pureness, according to Apostolic theology.—There are times when we hardly see the full pith of such a doctrine or feel its necessity; there are other times in the soul's experience when we feel that the purity of Christ was the chief element of his sacrifice.

—We must have a theology that covers all the moods and phases of spiritual experience; that grows with the day; that expands with the summer; and that fills even the winter with light and enriches the night with stars.—We do not want a theology that is adapted to one set of circumstances only. That theology could be easily invented, and could be as easily perverted. We must have a theology so lofty as not to permit of the handiwork of man, and yet so genial and condescending as to elicit the confidence and the love of the poorest and weakest of mankind.—Our judgment is not without blemish; our giving is not without blemish; our affections are not without blemish. Possibly there may be a line of selfish calculation running through all our most religious arrangements.—The object of Christ's priesthood is to make the Church "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing—a glorious Church."—When we would consider what the Church is to be we must fix our attention upon the blamelessness of Christ.—He is the pattern.—He is the consummation.

"... *the holy things of the Lord.*"—
LEVIT. v. 15.

Are we not told that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof"? Do not all things belong to Heaven? Has not God himself said "All souls are mine"? Has he not also said the "silver and the gold are mine," and "the cattle upon a thousand hills"? To these inquiries there can be but one reply. Still, the separation of things into special relations to the Most High is perfectly compatible with the universal proprietorship of God.—It is not always implied that one thing is holy and another sinful.—The term holy often means separated; that is to

say, set apart for special and exclusive purposes.—Taken in this sense, the Lord has from the beginning made special claims in his own name.—He has claimed one day in the week for rest and worship.—He has claimed offerings from the flock upon the field in acknowledgment of divine ownership.—He has set apart occasions for fast or festival, that the soul might address itself properly to the heavenly mercy.—Self-deception upon all such matters is very easy.—There is a piety which is void by generality.—When men say they give all they have to God, and, therefore, need not set aside particular sums, they confuse things that differ.—The man who lays claim to this entire consecration without having gone through a period of education shows the insidious nature of self-conceit.—Where is the man who has been enabled all at once, without training and without experience, to give all his time and store to the service of God? No such man has yet been discovered in history.—To claim to be such a man is to set up a claim for idolatry.—To regard all things, times, and places as holy is a leap of the imagination which is likely to involve impiety.—It is well for us to begin with one day in seven; one pound in ten; one church in a town, or a district of a town; from these partial appointments and sacrifices we may rise into the higher consecration.—To say that we have found some other way to that consecration than the way which God himself has marked out, is to have anticipated Omniscience and invented a new theory of human nature.—We are called upon to begin at distinct points, and to contribute of time, money, and influence, according to a measure; not, indeed, that we may stop there, but that, having tasted of the goodness of God's dispensation, we may go forward

steadily and loyally to perfection and rest.—Even with regard to the body and the mind, as they are known to us, some portions of them may be spoken of as being more peculiarly holy unto the Lord than are others.—Specially should we guard the conscience: the imagination, too, should be bent in worship at the holy altar: the will should be watched as fire is guarded. Errors of judgment may be venial, but when the conscience is bribed or stupefied who can prophesy good of the whole life?—To have some things marked as holy things of the Lord is to show at least the beginning of religious character and aspiration.

"Command Aaron and his sons."—
LEVIT. vi. 9.

This is a notable instruction.—Aaron and his sons were priests, and might therefore be supposed to be beyond official regulation or personal obedience.—God has no priests or other officers whom he has made independent of himself.—The commandment of God is exceeding broad, including "the armies of heaven and the children of men."—Theologians are only safe guides in proportion as they can point to the direct commands and institutions of Heaven.—A theologian without the Bible is the most enormous of all wicked pretences.—The priest is simply an interpreter, a helper, a stronger brother in the commonwealth of spiritual society; when he ventures to speak in his own name the Church should stop its ears or drive him away from the pedestal which he unworthily occupies.—God never gives up the Church, as to its education and progress, to the entire control of men, how great soever in office.—If the priest cannot do without commandment, how can the people? If priests

have to obey God, are the people exempt from obedience to the will of Heaven? The weaker may learn their duty from the stronger. If Aaron required continual inspiration and command, surely those of us who are of lower grade and smaller capacity cannot be sustained in our spiritual health and force except by the word of God.—There is a strong temptation to invent new commandments—to establish new institutions—to conduct experiments upon human credulity—to modify the arduousness of religious discipline, but whenever a prophet or a priest arises to tempt the soul in these directions he should be instantly called upon to prove his authority by the law and the testimony.—There cannot be two Bibles in the Church: in other words, there cannot be two sources or centres of authority.—Nor is any man at liberty to use private interpretation in the unfolding of the divine word.—Language is a common property; language has one key of interpretation; when the discussion becomes one of merely pedantic learning it is of really no interest to the great common heart of the Church;—the words or laws of God addressed to the general people are so simple and direct that the heart instantly recognises them.—The priest may have the power of reading them so as to invest their very utterance with new nobility, but it is not in priestly elocution or in any artifice of man to change the internal and solid meaning of the divine command.—Any man can get at God's meaning if he is prayerfully determined to acquaint himself with it.

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 “. . . *this is the law.*”—LEVIT. vii. 1.

We are thankful for definiteness.—Again and again this word occurs in the directions given to Moses.—Men

are not called upon to make any vital laws for themselves.—They are called upon to a kind of legislation which is either limited by momentary convenience or is expressive of an eternal law underlying the very constitution of life and society.—It would be impossible, for example, to make a law to steal.—Even if the law were laid down in so many words the heart would instantly detect its wickedness, and the spirit of man, inspired by the Almighty, would rise against it in burning rebellion. Here and there a man might be found base enough to avail himself of such a law; but the great human heart would disallow and disavow so wicked a pretence.—There will be no difficulty in asserting the law where the mind and the heart are free from prejudice.—God always looks for the honest heart, the pure heart, the contrite heart, the broken heart; with such a heart God has no difficulty, every word of his addresses itself instantly to that heart's necessity and pain.—We are not at liberty to fix upon isolated lines in the Bible and magnify these into laws; our duty, where anything is wanting in absolute definiteness, is to compare Scripture with Scripture, and to find out the Biblical and spiritual meaning rather than the narrow letter, which by its very narrowness may fail to express the divine purpose.—The way to understand the divine law is to discover it in the very spirit of the whole Bible.—To find out one line of vital importance it may be necessary to read the whole Scripture through from end to end.—Where does the Bible point to two Christs? Where does the Bible justify the worship of two Gods? Where does the Bible encourage the worship of God and Mammon? The Bible is always calling its readers to definiteness of conviction and preciseness of religious homage.—There is nothing

merely dogmatic or narrow-minded in this.—It may be made dogmatic and narrow-minded by those who pervert divine instructions; but definiteness has no necessary connection with arbitrary dogmatism.—The giving of definite instructions saves time; the giving of definite instructions saves the imagination from fruitless wondering and unprofitable speculation.—What doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? They who turn religion into a difficulty, or spiritual worship into a metaphysical puzzle, have in them an evil heart of unbelief, and are not to be trusted as teachers of the divine law.

"... that soul shall be cut off from his people."—LEVIT. vii. 27.

There are terrible excisions in life.—Expatriation is one.—Dismissal from the household circle is another.—Expulsion from friendly confidence and association is another.—There is a kinship of souls, and that kinship may be forfeited by evil behaviour.—Excommunication is not a merely priestly invention; it is based upon a divine decree, and is necessary for social health and honour.—Expulsion is threatened to all evil-doers, even by Christ himself. The unprofitable servant is to be cast into outer darkness.—Those who have only known the name of Christ are to be disavowed as utterly unknown to him, and are not to be admitted, however loud may be their too-late knocking at his door. The man without the wedding garment is to be turned away from the feast.—There is something solemnly awful in this notion of excision. The social touch may be lost. He who was once a child at home may be driven away by the scorn of those who have discovered his unworthiness. Had the

man never known the warmth of home and the charm of confidence the outer darkness would not be so blank and heavy to him.—It is when he remembers what he has lost that the night settles upon him as a burden which he cannot bear. Cut off! Cut off from his people! Living alone for ever! Or, what may be even worse, living for ever amongst strangers who detest his appearance, who suspect his motive, and who flee from his approach! By such hints as these we may get the beginning of an idea of what is meant by eternal punishment!—We have all been in a sense cut off from our people.—The grand evangelical doctrine is that we may return and be re-established in the household from which we have been ejected.—This is, at all events, an encouraging doctrine, full of tender comfort, and pregnant with a suggestion which may well lift the soul out of the deepest despair.—The word of the Bible is always a word calling upon the sinner to return.—God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God is waiting to receive the returning prodigal.—This attitude on his part does not express a mere sentiment. He is the very God who first cut off the soul, that through excision he might magnify the grace of salvation.—The soul knows when it has been cut off from its people.—It has longings and yearnings which tell a bitter tale. It is conscious of necessities which, when allowed freely to express themselves, cry for home and sense of sonship and assurance of security.—Imagine a star cut off from its central sun.—Imagine a branch cut out of the vine and cast away.—Look at a flower plucked up by the roots and disassociated from the processes of the spring.—All these images but dimly suggest the appalling condition of the soul that has been cut off from

its natural relations, dispossessed and disennobled by the hand of righteousness.—Out of all these considerations comes a call to caution, circumspection, and religious anxiety. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."—Let there be no boasting, as if discipline and watchfulness were no longer necessary.—The prayer of the soul should always be, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

"... *utterly unclean.*"—LEVIT. xiii. 44.

This is a ceremonial expression.—People in certain conditions of body were to be pronounced by the priest as "*utterly unclean.*"—The Bible is everywhere careful not to allow the idea of partial goodness or partial uncleanness.—There is a great moral suggestion in all this.—Once let a man consider that he is not so bad as some other man, and instantly false standards of purity are set up.—The Pharisee adopted this method of self-measurement, and separated himself from the publican by certain degrees of supposed righteousness. The consequence was that he went down to his house unjustified.—The idea of partial unrighteousness necessitates the idea of partial self-justification.—A partial righteousness obviates the necessity for a divine atonement.—The Bible proceeds upon the doctrine that "there is none righteous, no, not one"; that "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint"; that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."—"Utterly unclean," is the expression which best defines the condition of the soul as before God.—When we read the words "*utterly unclean*" in this connection we are to remember that they were only ceremonially used; they in no wise countenance the idea that some persons are morally partially unclean, and others

utterly unclean.—There are degrees of ceremonial purity, but there are no degrees of moral purity or righteousness as before God.—It was to an utterly unclean world that Jesus Christ came. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and truth is not in us." Every man must feel that he is "the chief of sinners."—This is not a rhetorical expression, nor is it to be judged comparatively as between one man and another; it is to express the soul's bitter consciousness of its personal unworthiness in view of the purity of heaven.—Every man knows that his own sin is the worst that can be possibly imagined. He knows its aggravations; he is aware of atmospheric influence and colour, not observable by any other eye, which give deadly heinousness to his whole line of conduct.—We are not called upon to judge ourselves by others: we are simply called upon to put our hand upon our mouth, and to lay our mouth in the dust, and to cry,—Unclean! unclean!—There is only one method of cleansing revealed in the Bible.—No man cleanses himself.—Without the shedding of blood there is no remission. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.—Jesus Christ, looking upon his Church, says,—"*Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*"—The moral cleanness of the human race is the sublimest miracle of God.

"... *such as he can get.*"—LEVIT. xiv. 30.

This is an incidental revelation of the considerateness and mercy of God.—All men could not procure the same kind of sacrifices. Some men were rich and others poor, and God determined the nature of the sacrifice by the social condition of the man. God

never omitted the sacrifice : however poor was the worshipper, some degree or form of sacrifice he was bound to supply.—This shows that the true sacrifice is in the spirit rather than in the offering which is made by the hand.—God has always acted upon the principle that every man must confess his personal sin.—Now that One Sacrifice has been offered for all, this law of personal offering is still in operation. It no longer refers to the sacrifice on account of sin, for that has been offered once for all by the Son of God ; it now refers to the daily sacrifice of homage, service, profession, and general conduct.—What a variety of offering is even now found upon the Christian altar !—Some men have laid upon that altar the greatest genius ever created by divine inspiration : others have laid upon that altar the humblest mental attributes ; the rich man has piled up his gold, and the widow has dropped in her mites ; but throughout the whole discipline of consecrated life no man is exempted from the operation of this beneficent taxing. We are to give as God has prospered us. The master and the servant must operate in various degrees ; not the master narrowing himself by the circumstances of the servant ; not the servant complaining because of the larger prosperity of the master ; each worshipper is to bring “such as he can get.”—This same law applies to work.—All men cannot publicly preach ; all men cannot make public testimony of allegiance to Jesus Christ ; all men cannot give money ; some men have next to no time to give, so heavy are the demands of labour ; but in some way, and in some degree, and at some time everyone can show that he has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, and has in him the new heart which spares nothing within its possession from the altar of the Cross.—How

long will men be in learning the variety of gift, the variety of opportunity, and the variety of responsibility, connected with Christian life ? We are too prone to betake ourselves to ruthless judgments of one another through not distinguishing between differences of capacity, opportunity, and all those circumstances which constitute the situation of life.—This kind of law has an educating influence upon the individual conscience.—It does not reduce the necessity of giving, it multiplies the opportunity of donation.—It is not for any one man to say that some other man should have brought a higher gift or tribute : to his own Master every man standeth or falleth : God will judge righteous judgment herein as in all other things.—Still the general inquiry may be put, leaving every man to apply it to himself, Who has given his very best to the Cross ? Who has spent every possible moment of time in the service of Christ ? Who has not spared some one indulgence or possession for his own gratification ? These are questions sharper than any two-edged sword, and they are not to be brandished about by any official hand, they are to be whispered rather than thundered, and every man is to make his own reply to the solemn and inevitable inquiry.

“When ye be come into the land of Canaan.”—LEVIT. xiv. 34.

The people were far enough from Canaan at this moment, yet a law of regulation was laid down for their conduct when they came into possession of the land. This is another revelation of the method of divine government.—Laws are made in advance.—The law is not always given merely from day to day ; the details of that law may be, so to say, announced morning by morning ; but the great law itself is

laid down from eternity, and therefore it covers all times and occasions, never altering in its spirit though continually adapting itself to varying conditions and institutions without losing one spark of its righteousness.—This is the great law of God.—The moment a man comes into the world the whole law is prescribed for him. There is a law of childhood, full of forbearance, pity, and hopefulness; a sublime accommodation of the Infinite to the helplessness of earliest years; there is a law of youth, having in it a touch of discipline and even severity, passion being curbed, and impatience being restrained greatly to the trial of the restricted spirit; there is a law provided for times of prosperity, so that every man knows what to do with his gold, and how to deport himself in plentiful harvests; there is also a law for the time of poverty, affliction, pain, and sorrow of every kind and name.—In this way a man is permitted to look a long period in advance.—He may not anticipate providences, but he can study the whole law which involves and determines every aspect and issue of human life.—It is beautiful, too, to notice how an instruction of this kind acts as a stimulus upon human thought and conduct.—It was well again and again to mention the very name of the promised land.—So now it is well for us amid the cloud and tumult of life to hear about heaven and rest, about the pure land of eternal noon and the tender music of supernal harmony.—We need great words mixed up with our little terms; as we need a great sky over-arching and blessing our little earth.—It is wonderful how near the words of comfort are laid up side by side with terms of law and discipline.—The Bible is a book of solaces.—It does not give comfort for the sake of enervating men but for the sake of stimulating and strengthening them;

every time Canaan is mentioned it is to stir up the soul to nobler duty and harder service: so every time we hear of heaven and its ineffable rest we should spring at earth's duties and toils with a new energy and a deeper determination.—The laws of heaven are fixed.—Its law is a law of righteousness, and because of the perfectness of its purity is the absoluteness of its rest.—God never allows us to suppose that entrance upon a higher state of life means exemption from law or rioting in the wantonness of licence.—Heaven contains the fuller law, and because of our enlarging capacity and sanctified will, the amplitude and grandeur of that law will not deter us from heavenly service or cause us to become weary in all the solemn study of eternal thought.—Let us cheer one another with these words.—Again and again at the close of the weary day let us say to one another, "When we come into the land of Canaan."—Hymns about the heavenly land may be so used as to rouse us to completer service in the field of battle or in the quieter field of unknown but needful suffering.

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". . . a scapegoat."—LEVIT. xvi. 10.

We must be very careful in the application of this term. It is one of the terms liable to abuse. The image has always been accepted as one symbolical of the work of Christ in bearing away the sins of the world. Considered strictly as a figure, it is full of beauty and helpful suggestiveness. It has, nevertheless, been open to the most mischievous perversion. We use the term now too freely in describing the action of a man who wishes to lay upon another the blame of actions which he himself has done. We speak of certain men as being "mere scapegoats"; as if they had been dragged in to meet the necessities

of a situation and to relieve others from the burden of just penalties.—The figure is not the less appropriate that it is open to perversion.—Sometimes the value of an analogy depends upon the fineness and even subtlety of its relations. We are never at liberty to abuse an analogy. Jesus Christ comes before us in the aspect of one who voluntarily takes upon himself our sins and bears them away so that they never can be found again.—Notice that he accepts the position voluntarily.—Notice that he himself actually proposes to become, in this sense, the Scapegoat of the human family.—Notice also that the sinner must be a consenting party to this most mysterious arrangement.—The Scapegoat does not come into the world and carry away the sins of mankind in any arbitrary fashion.—Every sinner must put his hands, as it were, upon the Christ of God, and by that act intimate his desire that Christ would bear his sins away.—Do not make a mere convenience of Christ.—Do not consider the presence of the Scapegoat a licence to sin.—The deceitful heart may say, —Take your own course, do just what you please, and at the end of the sinful day place all your iniquities upon the head of the Scapegoat, and he will bear them away into the wilderness of oblivion.—This is perversion; this is more than perversion, it is unpardonable blasphemy.—Blessed is the thought that the sin is borne away where it can never be found any more.—To have the memory of sin, to be for ever reminded of the commission of sin, to suffer all the inflictions possible to imagination in connection with sin, would be to destroy the very heaven which is connected with forgiveness.—In some mysterious way, not to be measured by human words or even conceived by human thought, sin is cast away where even the accuser cannot find it, or the

enemy bring it back to fling it in our burning face.—This is a divine dispensation. It is therefore not to be explained or made easy to the comprehension of mere reason. It is rather to be accepted by faith and by love, and being so accepted, the heart is aware of its certainty of preciousness by the sweet peace which steals into it and rules it into profound repose.

"And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger; I am the Lord your God."—LEVIT. xix. 9, 10.

Here is a marvellous distinction of classes. That distinction is carefully preserved throughout the whole record of Scripture. At first sight, it is not only a marvellous but an incredible thing that one man should be rich and another poor.—Poverty is more than a merely incidental condition of life.—There is a moral mystery about poverty, relating alike to the poor man and to the rich man.—It may seem heartless to speak in this way, and it would be heartless but for the consistent record of time and testimony of experience.—Here is a distinct recognition of the right of property.—We read of "thy field," and "thy vineyard," and "thy harvest."—Yet though property is distinctly recognised, beneficence is also made matter of law. The command is "thou shalt not" in every case. This shows that the harvest is God's before it is man's, and that it is only man's that it may be used according to the law of God.—Something was to be left in the field and in the vineyard for the poor and

stranger.—The poor and stranger are ministers of God, when rightly viewed. —They are not to be used as butts or objects of scorning and contempt; but as opportunities for the exercise, not of sentimental, but of lawful and divinely-regulated charity.—Nor are the poor and the stranger to consider themselves as ill-used on account of their position. There is a poverty that is wealth. Only the mean in spirit, or the imperfectly trained, or the ridiculously vain, can object to receive the assistance or the comfort of the stronger classes of society.—If some men are poor and strangers, they must remember that they are exempt from many of the responsibilities which attach to higher station. —Besides, riches and poverty are simply relative terms.—What is wealth to one man is poverty to another; and what is poverty to one man is wealth to another. There is no line at which contentment is absolutely and certainly reached, and apart from which contentment is an impossibility.—It is a profound mistake to imagine that the rich are exempt from pain, sorrow, loss, and that there is no serpent in their paradise.—Nor must the rich man imagine that he is exceedingly good and generous because he leaves something for the gleaner, or because here and there he has left a grape upon the vine. He is bound to do this. It is one of the divine taxations of property. What is left may be comparatively small as to its bulk and value, but the very fact of its being left establishes a divine claim and begins what may, under proper conditions, develop into a splendid scheme of social philanthropy. To be compelled to think about the poor even to the extent of leaving a few gleanings in the field or a grape or two in the vineyard is a part of human education which can hardly be too highly valued.—In

various ways God draws the attention of rich men to the presence and the need of the poor; and he is indeed a man who has wasted his larger opportunities who has not eaten his own bread with fuller content and tenderer piety because of his endeavours to elevate the lot of the poor.—All these doctrines may be abused, or misunderstood, or even turned into ridicule; nevertheless, the wise in heart will so use them as to minister to the solid development of the best forms of character.—The Bible is the book of the poor.—From no other book in the world could so many injunctions be culled as bearing upon the rich in relation to the claims of poverty.—These grand philanthropic lines running from end to end of the Bible will always secure for the Bible a place in the highest thinking and best affections of all lands.

"Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have."—LEVIT. xix. 36.

A book which talks in this language is a book which ought to be carefully preserved by the people.—The Bible is not a sentimental book, dealing with abstract emotion, or confining itself to metaphysical mysteries.—It has its deep places which cannot be plumbed, and its great heights which dazzle the most daring eye, but again and again it comes upon the common ground and insists that everything between man and man shall be done healthily, honestly, and lovingly.—A religion that examines the balances and weights is a religion that may be trusted to attach a true value to praise and prayer.—This is the strength of Biblical doctrine.—Many a man would be glad to accept the metaphysical mysteries of the Bible if he could escape its practical criticism.—There would

be no difficulty in making theologians if they could be allowed to do as they liked with the common practices of daily life.—The Bible will not allow of any trifling with right and wrong, and therefore it is the terror of the bad man, and not likely to be a favourite in any circle whose worship is bounded by compromise or calculation.—Just balances and just weights can only come out of a just *creed*.—For a man to adjust his balances and his weights for fear of the penalty of the law is by no means to be honest. His care simply implies that he is afraid of punishment, otherwise he would gladly avail himself of the wages of unrighteousness.—All these strict moral demands on the part of the Bible should make the acceptance of the spiritual mysteries, and even of miracles the more easy.—We need not begin with the miracles, and because we cannot understand them reject the morality; we should begin at the other end, saying thankfully: A book which is so true, upright, and wholly just in all its views of social relations is a book which will not trifle with profounder mysteries and more distant truths, and though we cannot now understand these we will begin, by the grace of God, at all accessible and practical points.—The just balances were not to be used only as amongst the children of Israel themselves. The Israelites were to be just to all men. When Christian nations are just to Pagan people, the Pagan people may begin to inquire the more carefully into the religion of such honest nations.—We may astound men by our metaphysics; we can only conciliate them by our temper and conduct.—Whilst it is well to reject the doctrine of works as between ourselves and God as constituting in any sense a ground of justification, we should cultivate that doctrine as between man and man, and prove the

reality of our faith by the genuine goodness of our actions.

"I . . . have severed you from other people."—LEVIT. XX. 26.

It is useless to cavil about such separations, because there they are, as a matter of indisputable fact in human history. Whoever made the differences, we have to acknowledge their existence, and to consider how best to treat them.—There are highly-civilised nations, and there are nations absolutely without formal language or written records. There are nations living upon land which brings forth abundantly, and seems to be but too eager to respond to the efforts of the cultivator: there are other people living, as it were, in barren wildernesses, to whose toil the inhospitable earth makes no reply. There are nations distinguished by the most brilliant intellectual genius, and other peoples who have scarcely the faintest notions of rational life. These differences must have had some origin. The shallowest of all ways of accounting for them is to refer them to mere chance.—It requires more faith to believe in chance than to believe in God,—that is to say, faith in the sense of mere credulity.—Whatever may be the differences in mere ethnology—that is, differences as between one race and another,—it is certain that in the Biblical conception of society a very broad distinction is made between the people of God and all other people.—This again is not arbitrary; it comes out of the very nature of the separating God himself.—It is only because God is different from all other gods that his people are different from all other people.—This gives a new and elevated view to the whole conception of human differences.—When the nations accept God as revealed in

Jesus Christ, they invariably approximate to the same level.—Christianity does not drag down its believers to the level of other nations, it lifts up other nations to the level of its own elevation.—There is no encouragement to moral pedantry in such separations.—The difference is to be one of quality, and the higher the quality the less disposition there is to exult in it in the sense of feeling contempt for other people.—When the mind of Christ is fully in the minds of those who believe in him they will make themselves of no reputation and take upon themselves the form of servants that they may do good to others.—The morality of Christ is different from all other morality. It is not mere morality in the sense of calculation and adjustment to times and circumstances, it is spiritual morality, it is inspired conduct, it is full of divine passion as well as solid with divine righteousness.—Whatever might be the limitations imposed upon the Jews for temporary and local purposes, it is certain that no restrictions are placed upon Christians for the evangelising of the world.—The express command of Christ is that the Gospel should be preached to every creature.—The grand revelation made to the narrow mind of Peter was that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.—Christianity would separate itself from other peoples, in order that it might raise other peoples to a higher platform.—Its elevation increases its leverage.—The withdrawal of Christians from other people is so conducted, when rightly conducted, as to show the other people that no contempt is involved in the severance, but rather a profound and unquenchable desire to turn the whole world into a Church of the living God.—The separation is not to be one of merely outward conduct; it is to be a severance of spirit,

of moral sympathy, of the very essence of life. It would be quite possible to draw up a programme of conduct which should be marked by mere eccentricity; but such a programme would never commend itself to the judgment of fair-dealing men: we do not want a nicely balanced programme, but a new heart, a purified conscience, and a spirit charged with the passionateness of Christ.—Christ was in the world, yet not of the world.—Christ could eat with publicans and sinners, and yet not be defiled by the association.—Monasticism is not taught by this text.—Men are to move up and down in the world, transacting all its usual business, and yet so to do the work of life as to exert a benign influence, and fill other men with encouragement to move in an upward direction.

"I will be hallowed among the children of Israel."—LEVIT. xxii. 32.

Reverence is the very basis of lofty character, and is the guarantee of the purity of society.—When our worship falls our conduct will go down along with it.—The loftier the prayer, the tenderer will be the common speech of the day.—If the children of God do not hallow him, the enemy never will.—God, so to say, depends upon his position in the world upon the loyalty of his own people.—If we are ashamed of God, God will be ashamed of us.—"Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."—We cannot love our neighbour until we love our God.—The commandments, which are now but two in number, are really set in philosophical relation to one another.—In this sense theology is the great philosophy of life.—We cannot revere a redeeming God, and yet be careless about the moral condition of the

people.—We cannot pray to a throne of mercy, and then seat ourselves upon chairs of judgment.—Our intensest solicitude should be expended upon the idea of true worship.—To have a small conception of God is to have a small conception of life.—To be irreverent in any degree towards Heaven is to be flippant in all our social relations.—When a man has come away from long and profound communion with a God of purity and tenderness, it is impossible for him to either sympathise with iniquity, or to be impatient with weakness. As a debtor himself to the mercy of God, he is bound to be a creditor to the infirmities of his fellow-men.—When the intellect of the Church supersedes the worship of the Church, Ichabod may be written upon its doors.—The tendency of the times may be to magnify preaching above prayer, or genius above meditation : this may be to pay a flattering tribute to the spirit of so-called progress, but it is to lose the very bloom of godliness.

"For unto me the children of Israel are servants."—LEVIT. xxv. 55.

This is a remarkable expression as connected with the fact of which God is always reminding the children of Israel, namely, that he brought them out of the house of bondage and out of the land of Egypt. He appears to acquire his hold upon their confidence by continually reminding them that at one period of their history they were bondmen.—Now he insists that the men whom he has brought into liberty, have been brought only into another kind of service.—This is the necessity of finite life. Every liberty is in some sense a bondage.—Christians are the slaves of Christ ; they are burden-bearers and yoke-carriers, specially under the supervision and sovereignty

of the Son of God.—All depends upon the nature of the service which is rendered.—Where the service is arbitrary and compulsory, it is of necessity reluctant, and by so much vicious and worthless.—The glory of Christian service is that such bondage is considered sweeter than any other freedom : those, indeed, who have known most about it have not hesitated to describe it as the glorious liberty of the children of God.—Where our love is, there is our service.—In the best sense of the term, we are the slaves of those whom we love.—Christians are called into the sweet bondage which gives them liberty.—They have seen that the mastery of Jesus Christ is a sovereignty which reason can accept, and love can joyfully obey.—It is not because of the grandeur of the mastery or the superlativeness of celestial dignity, it is because the sovereignty of Christ is in harmony with all that is best and purest in human nature itself ; filling up every void in the life, and giving full development and scope to every faculty of the being.—The earth is glad to be the slave of the sun.—The folly of rebelling against the Christian religion because it requires the subjugation of the will ought to be obvious to every unprejudiced mind.—The subjugation of the will is a phrase, the meaning of which wholly depends on circumstances which have to be explained. To subjugate the will to an inferior is to disennoble human nature ; to subjugate the will to an equal because of some temporary advantage is the deepest injustice to one's self. But to subjugate the will to the eternal God is really to acquire a still higher will, and to enter into the mystery of the peace of the God whose will we have accepted.—No analogy can be drawn as between the subjugation of the will of man to man, and the subjugation of

the will to God.—This is the foundation principle of the true theocracy.—We are taught to say,—“Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven”; and again,—“Not my will, but thine, be done.”—If Christ could say this in his human relation, we need have no difficulty in repeating it in our condition.—When did the will of God ever interfere with the broadest and deepest human progress? When did it turn aside noble aspiration? When did it enclose the soul in selfish narrowness, and forbid the outgoing of sympathy towards the outcast and the weary?—By these signs and tokens should the divine will be examined and judged.—Christianity does not shrink from such examination, but rather challenges it, knowing that they who know most of God will be most ready to accept his gracious dominion.

“I have broken the bonds of your yoke, and made you go upright.”—LEVIT. xxvi. 13.

God will have no slavery of a social kind.—He is against all bonds and restrictions that keep down the true aspirations of the human soul.—God has always proceeded upon the principle of enlargement and the inheritance of liberty.—We know how much God has done for a man by the degree of that man's uprightness.—That is an excellent and undeniable standard of judgment.—God has no crouching slaves cringing around his altar and afraid to look up to the Cross which has given them forgiveness.—In proportion as we are carrying bands and yokes, have we not known the Spirit of the living God.—This relates to all conduct and religious observances, to the keeping of times and seasons, and the offering of all manner of sacrifices.—Whatever is done through a sense of servility and humiliation is wrongly

done, and is in no sense done in obedience to the command of Christ.—When all is right within we run in the way of God's commandments, we sing at our work, we turn the very statutes of God into songs in the house of our pilgrimage.—What God has been doing for man in the first instance has been the breaking of yokes.—God has had much negative work to do for fallen humanity.—We do not know how much of our progress is due to the breaking of cruel restrictions,—the whole course of human history has been a course of enlargement and freedom in matters of education, knowledge, and the possession and exercise of personal and social rights.—This is in accordance with the very spirit of the New Testament.—Some men may not have made great progress in positive liberty, who yet have made some advance in the sense of having thrown off many restrictions and yokes, such throwing off being due to the operation of a gracious providence, which providence, indeed, is not always understood or gratefully appreciated; nevertheless, it works in human history with an undeviating and generous aim.—There is an hereditary principle involved in this arrangement; it is impossible that the children of upright men can fail in some sense to partake of the advantages arising from parental uprightness; those conditions may not amount to personal righteousness, and, indeed, may have no necessary relation to such righteousness, but the whole atmosphere is the purer and healthier for our relation to forefathers who have been upright and wise and generous.—More is expected of us, and the expectation is founded in reason and justice.—We are the greater debtors to society on account of the liberty into which we were born, and the uprightness under whose blessing we were reared.—Always

acknowledge the divine hand in human history.—Always see that theology is indeed the larger history.—He knows nothing about history who is merely conversant with outward facts and the succession of measurable incidents : history lies in its spirituality : there is a genius of history,—a religion of liberation and progress.

“And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant.”—LEVIT. XXVI. 25.

It may be reverently said that God does not deal carelessly with his own covenants. He does not throw them away, and take no further heed of their operation. In the sense of looking after his word and observing its issues he may be described in Old Testament language as a “jealous” God.—This great principle operates in nature as well as in grace.—We see it in agriculture as certainly as we see it in what may be termed spiritual human conduct. We are not only punished because we do not pray, we are just as much punished because we do not plough.—If a man will not sow in the seedtime he shall not reap in the harvest, and not having anything to reap, or any fruits to garner, he will know the meaning of the mystic words, “I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant.”—If a man will not gather water in the time when the river is full he shall surely die of thirst in the season of drought.—Who quarrels with this law of nature ? Who says this is partial or unjust ? We feel that the operation of such a law in nature is one of the guarantees of society.—The covenant is here represented as a living thing having a quarrel against those who trifle with its spirit and claim.—The covenant does not seem to avenge itself, but a sword from heaven is

let down to smite those who have dealt unkindly and unjustly with the angel of God.—This is a very solemn but a very grand and ennobling view of life.—We know how true it is that the spirit of love cannot be outraged without the whole life suffering evil consequences.—We also know that the spirit of honesty cannot be offended without a great fear and shaking passing through the whole constitution and framework of human relations.—It is by such aids as these that we raise ourselves into a conception of spiritual realities and issues.—Peace can only come by righteousness. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”—Discard theology, deny every proposition which theologians have ever asserted, and turn away from all prescribed religious forms, yet still there remains the indisputable fact that evil-doing is followed by tumult and pain, or if not so followed, a state of heart is revealed which is simply past feeling, and under whose judgments and actions human society is no longer safe.—Whenever a sword smites us we should inquire how we have been dealing with God's covenant.—Whenever the grave opens at our feet we should put solemn questions to ourselves regarding our treatment of the covenant of life.—Whatever helps to deeper religious consideration is a true agent in the education of mankind.

“And upon them that are left alive of you, I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies : and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them ; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword ; and they shall fall when none pursueth.”—LEVIT. XXVI. 36.

So wrong-doing is never blessed.—Even when men appear to succeed and

to save themselves alive, their success is partial, and may only create an opportunity for further divine judgment.—Do not suppose that men are successful simply because they are living.—A man may have escaped the sea only to die a more terrible death on land.—Marvellous are the judicious resources of God.—We have an indication here of a law to whose subtle force many men can testify.—Fear takes away all power, and turns the most dauntless soldier into a coward.—We cannot account for faintness of heart; it has no history; it cannot be cross-examined; it is something sent into us by a higher power, and is permitted to work miracles in the spirits of otherwise brave men.—We are surrounded by mystery.—The sound of "a shaken leaf" is magnified by the imagination into the sound of a rushing army.—Shadows are ministers of Heaven.—Unexplained noises come to do the work of judgment.—It is not enough to describe these things as superstition, or fancy, or nightmare: there they are, operating directly and energetically in the whole administration of life, and it is more rational to accept a spiritual interpretation of them than to regard them as mere dreams without purpose or force.—By so talking of them we disprove our own argument by the very fact that we are ruled by them, and cannot resist their effect.—God crushes some men as by a great weight: other men he beclouds so that reason cannot find its way through all the conditions of life's necessities: the memory of other men is taken away: men who never feared the face of man have fled before a shaking leaf, as if they were fleeing from an infinite sword.—It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.—Our God is a consuming fire.—It is gracious on his part that he should be so revealed.—

His severity is but an aspect of his love.—We read of the wrath of the Lamb.—Can any wrath be so terrible? Can any surprise be so startling? Was ever such a change contemplated by the boldest imagination of man? When love becomes wrath, how hot is that perdition!—Yet God is always willing to turn, anxious to be conciliated, prepared to readopt the wandering child.—When we take out the element of fear from the Christian ministry, we deprive that ministry of one of its most useful auxiliaries.—Christ never failed to avail himself of the uses of fear.—There was a "hell" even in the gracious speech of the Saviour of the world.—He did not conceal the sword; he revealed it in its strength and keenness.

"... whatsoever passeth under the rod."

—LEVIT. xxvii. 32.

This passage brings under our attention the fact that many passages of Scripture have been misinterpreted.—The misinterpretations of Scripture have been full of mischief.—Men should make sure of the interpretation before they assert the doctrine.—This has always been understood to refer to punishment, the figure being that God is smiting every one of his flock, and is only approving of them according to the measure of stripes which that flock lovingly accepts. No such meaning is to be attached to these words.—Instead of being severe they are gentle: instead of pointing to chastisement they point to proprietorship.—The idea is that the flock are passing into the fold, and that the shepherd is causing each of them to be numbered by the rod.—The sheep that pass under the rod in this sense have passed from out of the field into the security of the fold. They have been numbered. They have

been safely housed.—The idea is that the flock does not go in as a whole without regard to individuality.—Sheep by sheep enters the sacred enclosure.—We are saved one by one.—We die one by one.—We are to be judged one by one.—Every man shall give an account of himself to God.—Those who have passed under the rod have been acknowledged as the sheep of the Shepherd; no mistake has been made as to the identity of the sheep; no other shepherd can come and claim any sheep that has so passed.—There is but one

Shepherd who can identify each member of his flock, and cause each to pass into the fold from which there shall be no more going out.—Do not let us turn sweet words of grace and promise into bitter words of chastisement and penalty.—There is more sweetness in the Bible than we have yet discovered.—Do not let us be afraid to go up to many passages of which we have heretofore stood in terror; instead of being avenging angels they may be loving friends, waiting to deliver to us some new and larger message from heaven.

NUMBERS.

So called from the two numberings (ch. i. and ch. xxvi.) of the people at the beginning and end of the wanderings. The book relates to a period of thirty-eight years and three months, from the completion of the Law-giving, "the first day of the second month of the second year" of the Exodus, to the first day of the fifth month of the fortieth year. Its contents have been thus summarised:—(1) The breaking up of the encampment at Sinai; arrangement of the army, and the service of the priestly tribe, with an inventory of their charge; the parting service and blessing. (2) The march upon Canaan and its repulse. (3) Rebellions; confirmation of Moses and Aaron in authority; condemnation of the people to death in the wilderness. (4) Various events in the forty years' wandering. (5) Events of the last year, *e.g.*, the deaths of Miriam and Aaron; Balaam's mission; the corruption of the people by the Midianites, and its consequences; laws of inheritance, etc.

From the death of Aaron to the opening of Deuteronomy there is a space of exactly six months. The first month of the six was passed at the foot of Mount Hor mourning for Aaron. Next ensued the journey to the brook Zered, accomplished within four weeks. Then came the two battles at Jahaz and Edrei. During the next two months the Israelites were engaged in completing and consolidating their conquest of Gilead and Bashan.



Numbers i.

THE CENSUS AND ITS MEANING.

HOW long is it since the Tabernacle was set up? From some points of view it would seem to be years at least. Time is variously estimated : it is long,—it is short,—it is a flying wing,—it is a mountain of lead,—according to the circumstances under which we view and reckon it. Just *one month* has elapsed since the Tabernacle was set up, and during that month the whole ritual of Leviticus has been wrought out. Leviticus was not a manual for a year ; it was a ritual for a month. It would wear some of us out ; we have lived ourselves into shortening days. What a busy month ! Read the whole Book of Leviticus, from the first chapter to the last, and then remember that every word of it was to be carried out in critical detail within the compass of a single month, and when the month was over the ritual was to be begun again. All life was one Sabbath then. In very deed the days were well-filled in with labour—pressed down, heaped up, running over. Life meant something then. Poor are our services,—poor to begin with, run through perfunctorily, leaving behind not so much a thought as a faint impression—not an unconquerable inspiration, but a memory of partial weariness.

“And the Lord spake—.” He was always speaking in the olden times ; he never speaks now. How foolish is such reasoning ! how vicious and degrading such a sophism ! We first misinterpret the terms, and then declare the conditions are never repeated. We bar out good things from ourselves not only by sin but by impious ignorance, by narrow-mindedness, by superstition meant for veneration. God is always speaking wherever he can find a Moses. Surely, he will not speak to stocks and stones, and deaf men and callous hearts : he will call up a child at midnight to whisper in his ear. It is the hearer that is

wanting, not the speaker. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith. "And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying—" It is our consciousness that is dull—afflicted, indeed, with incurable stupidity; it is our will that is ironed in unholy obstinacy; otherwise, we should write down in plain ink, in open letters, in our mother tongue,—“The Lord spake unto me, saying—.” We have to fight the ghost of superstition; we have lost spiritual health; we are in a diseased condition of mind and heart. To set up the Lord in ancient history, or exalt him into the inaccessible heavens, is mistaken for veneration. How suddenly the subject is changed! We have been reading about the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, the shedding of blood, the consecration of priests; and our whole mind has, so to say, been steeped in religious thought and sacred phraseology, and now, by the overturning of one page, we come upon the divinely-appointed and divinely-directed census of Israel:—Number the people: mark them out in their families and tribes: arrange them according to a plan, and let us know the sum-total of the war force of Israel. We have been thinking, if not talking, of prayer,—suddenly the word *battle* is put into the history. Thus the chapter of life changes; the Author is the same, the writing continuous, with the same noble fluency, the same intellectual dignity, the same imaginative vividness, the same marvellous dramatic change of point and colour; but the subject is organisation for battle, a call for soldiers,—words that might have been spoken through a trumpet; yet the speaking God, the hearing Moses, the obedient Israel, are the unchanged quantities of the story. The Lord could have counted the people himself: why did he set others to do the numbering? It is part of his providence. He could do everything himself; but he trains us by criticism, by the use of our faculties, by the discharge of manifold duties and responsibilities. We need not pray to God as the mere necessity of informing him of our wants, because he knows every one of them better than the suppliant can know his own necessities; but this is educational: our prayer is part of our schooling; to project our heart's necessity into words is a marvellous thing to keep the tongue in balance of the heart, so that the speech shall not run out the need, or the argument be in excess of the conviction; so God cleanses the tongue and

subdues it, bringing it into harmony with the whole movement of his own purpose and will. Reluctant, lying tongue! double-speaking tongue! how canst thou be turned and chastened into noble service but by being charged with prayer? This is God's wise way. How was the numbering to proceed? Every man was of consequence. We think we honour God by speaking of him only as the Lord of Creation, the God of Hosts, the Ruler of incalculable armies stretching over spaces infinite; it is our poverty of thought that so strains itself as to lay hold of what to us are great numbers;—God rather seeks to glorify himself in counting men one by one. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." Looking round his banqueting-table, he says,—Yet there is room. He seems to notice the vacancies as certainly and as clearly as he notices the occupations. To us, numbers are alone of consequence; to our Father, the one child is of great importance: saith he,—One is wanting: go fetch him; call more loudly for him: the next appeal may strike his ear and elicit the response of his heart; go out again, and again, and rather blame the darkness of the night than the unwillingness of the child; give him one more opportunity. This is the philosophy: that the little is always striving to make up for its littleness by conceptions of infinite numbers; and the great—the divinely and essentially great—shows its quality by lighting a candle and sweeping the house diligently till it finds the piece that was lost. We owe ourselves to God's condescension. The men were to be registered for battle according to "the number of their names . . . from twenty years old and upward." Do we begin life at twenty? Are the nineteen years gone, forgotten, unreckoned? "Twenty years old" is the harvest time of preparatory education. At twenty a man should be able to give some account of himself; he ought to have read some books; he ought to know the figure of the world, and to have acquired, at least, a general outline of the little scheme of things within which he lives—a little fluttering wing of a world—just one little tuft of smoke whirled by infinite rapidity into an earth, a school-house, a preparation-place; yea, "the great globe itself" is but a handful of smoke whirled into rotundity and made use of, until we become "twenty years old and upward." Let us have no frivolity even in the nineteen preparatory years. Every

man is getting ready for war ; every boy at school is a soldier in possibility. The children will be greater than we were : otherwise, they will have lost their foot-hold upon the line of progress, and have dropped out of the noble traditions of their species. Some men are long in beginning ; they are not wholly to be blamed : men ripen in various degrees of rapidity ; "Soon ripe, soon rot," is the old proverb, not wanting in wisdom. Others come to maturity slowly, but having reached maturity no wind can shake their deep roots.

There are some remarkable things about the census : for example, what high titles we find here ! Following the first list of names, we read in the sixteenth verse : "These were the renowned of the congregation, princes of the tribes of their fathers, heads of thousands in Israel." So Egyptian bondage did not stamp out Israelitish pedigree and claim upon the past. Our bondage need not destroy our manhood. Israel recovered its noblest memories and reclaimed divine purposes and covenants which had fallen into desuetude and into the formality of a dead letter. We may go back over the period of our banishment and humiliating captivity and claim to bear the image and likeness of God ; we, who went astray, may return unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, and may become kings and priests unto God and the Father. Why should the mind plunge itself into the despair of guilt, rather than avail itself of God's ministry and mediation in Christ to project itself to earlier times and original policies and begin with the purpose and intent of God ? There are, too, some singular fulfilments of prophecy in the numbering of the tribes. Judah had the most to set in array. Was this a mere accident ? Not according to Genesis xlix. 8 : "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise." So we find, in the numbering, Judah stood first—the largest of the host. We find, too, that Ephraim had a number larger than Manasseh. Was this a mere incident, hardly to be accounted for ? There are no such incidents in life : everything is accounted for, or to be accounted for, by those who search into roots, beginnings, motives, and divine intentions. In Genesis xlviii. 20, we find how Israel blessed the sons of Joseph,—“And he blessed them that day, saying, . . . God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh : and he set Ephraim before Manasseh,”—Joseph said, No ; but

the old father said, Yes!—Manasseh “also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he,”—and now that the census is taken Ephraim stands at the head of Manasseh! The details are given critically from verse to verse: “the tribe of Reuben were, forty and six thousand and five hundred”; “the tribe of Simeon were, fifty and nine thousand and three hundred”; “the tribe of Gad were, forty and five thousand six hundred and fifty”; “the tribe of Judah were, three-score and fourteen thousand and six hundred.” These are petty details,—what is the sum-total? “. . . all they that were numbered were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty”! *That* is what we wanted to ascertain! The tribes might exchange friendly challenges and criticisms as to their varying numbers as between and amongst themselves, — a little boasting might be permitted, a little religious pride; but leaving the details as amongst the tribes themselves we come to the broad and grand truth that in relation to any enemy, rise where he might, there were six hundred thousand men ready to dispute the ground with him inch by inch. To-day the Christian denominations are talking to one another about their various thousands: they take a melancholy pride in saying that one denomination has made five per cent. more progress than some other denomination. This is what they have to suggest in place of love and in place of prayer! Simeon takes his census, and Gad reports his figures, and Issachar reminds the other denominations that he has fifty-four thousand enrolled under his banner, and Zebulun tells Issachar that his fifty-four are not equal to Zebulun’s fifty-seven. These figures are interesting up to a certain degree and within given boundaries; but how many men can Christ put on the field against the devil and his angels? Do not be chaffering to one another and boasting as between fifty-four thousand and fifty-seven thousand; but stand together, shoulder to shoulder, and say: All for Christ; the enemy must not fight one tribe, but the consolidated hosts of God. It was but detailed and vexatious reading up to the forty-fifth and forty-sixth verses: we longed to know the sum-total of the strength on which Christ could reckon; that is what we want to know to-day. A little friendly emulation, as between the various Christian communions,

may relieve the monotony and inactivity of our modern piety ; but what Christ would know is on what military strength he can reckon when he is challenged to the battle of Armageddon.

These men whose names and tribes are given were men qualified to be sent forth to war. At that period of history war was an unhappy necessity : it was the school in which men were trained. We must read history in its own light and grow with its growth, if we would understand its philosophy and its purpose. If we deny the writing that is before us as an inspiration, we have still to confront the fact that social classes are precisely divided to-day as they were distributed in the pages of the Bible ; when we have denied the inspiration, we have still to deal with the fact. What is the distribution of society to-day ? Military, commercial, educational ;—these classes could not be interchanged. The true soldier can be nothing but a soldier : to bind him down to anything else is to invert his destiny. Men have the call of God in them. No man is at liberty to say what he is going to be and going to do. He has nothing “to do” but to obey. It may please him to talk about his “freedom,” but it is the freedom of a cage. “Train up a child in the way he should go,”—in the way of God’s purpose, according to the predestination of his life,—“and when he is old, he will not depart from it”—he will know at the end that all his life-pulses have been throbbing in harmony with the infinite music of the divine purpose. The true merchant could never be a soldier : he *must* buy and sell, he *must* make a little profit if he would sleep well at night ; it is in his blood ; he cannot retire to rest until he has bartered, discounted, added up, and given and taken receipts in full. If you suggested to him to go out to battle you would but distress his timid soul ; men of his temperature of blood were meant to buy and sell and to live in the awful tumult of a controversy across the counter. The scholar could never be a merchant ; he must inquire and he must communicate ; a book is a treasure to him ; a new thought drives him well-nigh mad,—it may be true : if true, it would set back the horizon, heighten the dome of heaven, and make all things new ; he does not want to buy and sell, but to peruse, to examine, to criticise, to compare, to amass information, and to communicate his intelli-

gence to others ; he is a philosopher and a teacher, not a bagman or a banker. There is the fact. Why quarrel with the Book of Numbers and raise a noisy discussion as to whether Moses wrote it ? The Book of Numbers is being written to-day : a million hands are doing the clerical work ; we are standing yet in this grand organisation and distribution of labour.

But some were not permitted to go to battle ;—who were they ? They were the Levites : “. . . the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered” among the warriors. They were appointed to be near “the tabernacle of testimony,” and were set “over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it” ; they were to “bear the tabernacle, and all the vessels thereof” ; and they were to “minister unto it,” and to “encamp round about the tabernacle” ; and when the tabernacle was set forth, the Levites were to “take it down” ; and when the tabernacle was to be pitched in a new place, the Levites were to “set it up” ; “and the children of Israel” were to “pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts.” Then the Levites were not soldiers ? Not in the narrow construction of the term ; but all truly religious men are soldiers. “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.” The Sunday-school teachers of the land are its most powerful constabulary ; the truly Christian ministry is the very spirit of militancy—not urged against flesh and blood, visible substances, and nameable human enemies ; but against the whole spirit of perdition and against the whole genius of darkness. “Soldiers of Christ, arise, and put your armour on !” That is the heroic call,—may every man stand up and say,—Here am I : send me !

PRAYER.

THE Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice. To us there is but one God. Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven; not our will but thine be done. Thou hast wrought in us this grace. We own thy power; thy law to us is liberty. We have no will: thy will be done—is the cry of the heart made right. It is well. Thou knowest all things; thou seest the end from the beginning. We cannot tell what a day may bring forth; we have no ground of evidence or argument, or reckoning; we are shut up in the darkness. Thou knowest all eternity. Thy will be done. This is the Lord's prayer; this is the prayer he taught us in the time of his bloody sweat, in the agony intolerable. We would hear the prayer; we would adore the suppliant; we would endeavour to repeat the glorious utterance; but thy Spirit alone can enable us to do this; we want our heart to say it—our whole spirit—without keeping back one feeling, one word, one reserve. This would be the sacrifice preceding resurrection, triumph, heaven. Thy will be done. Thou dost raise up men from the dung-hill, and set them among princes. It is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. Thou dost make the first last and the last first, and fix the places at the banquet-table without consulting any guest; thy will be done. One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet; another in the bitterness of his soul, who never eateth with pleasure, whose days are nights and whose nights are wildernesses; it is the Lord: let him do what seemeth good in his sight. Thou dost permit the old man to live until he becomes a burden unto himself; thou dost pluck the young blossom when it is the chief beauty of the garden: the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. We would stand in the assurance that the Judge of all the earth will do right; that the very hairs of our head are all numbered; that the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and though he fall he shall rise again. Herein is peace; herein is eternal Sabbath day. Give us this confidence in larger measure until it shall consummate itself in heaven's own peace. Thou knowest our impatience, our wildness of impulse, the difficulty we have in stopping to reason well—the Lord pity us! This is the pressure of the time which is so very short: we see the descending sun, and we want to do so much before the twilight of evening. We know not what we do; we are poor at the richest, weak at the strongest, ignorant in our utmost knowledge. We will rest in the Christ of God; labouring and heavy laden, we will come to him, and he will give us rest; his peace he will give unto us: not as the world giveth will he give, but otherwise—an eternal and infinite donation. Keep us in the love of God, always seeking for truth, welcoming wider knowledge, enjoying the enlargement of our liberty; but knowing always that Christ is first and last and midst, the dawn and the

day, the star of the evening, the hope of the midnight; on the Cross, on the throne; suffering, praying, teaching, reigning; the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. O, Lord Christ Jesus, take us closely to thyself, and speak to us words which will make us live! Amen.

Numbers ii.

DIVINE APPOINTMENTS.

THIS chapter deals with the order of the tribes in their tents. Though at first we may seem to have no relation to this order, at last it may be perceived that we are in vital relations to it. Let us first set before the mind vividly the literal exactness of the case. The camp of Judah was to set forth first; the camp of Reuben was to set forth in the second rank; the camp of Ephraim was to go forward in the third rank; the camp of Dan was to go *hindmost* with their standards. Who arranged this order? The answer is in the first verse: "And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, . . the camp of Judah . . first; . . the camp of Reuben . . second; . . the camp of Ephraim . . third; . . the camp of Dan . . hindmost." It was a military tone; there was nothing suggestive in its music; it was imperative, complete, final. Keep positiveness of speech quite vividly before the mind, even at the expense of some tediousness in words. Judah first, Reuben second, Ephraim third;—these terms are arithmetical and may be accepted without murmuring; but the next term is more than arithmetical: the camp of Dan "*hindmost*." That seems to be a word of stigma and of inferiority and of rebuke. Had the numbers been, —first, second, third, *fourth*, the arithmetic would have been complete; but to be *hindmost* is to be further behind than to be merely fourth; it is to have the position marked so broadly as almost to amount to a brand of tribal degradation. All this was to be done; it never could have been done but by divine appointment. A third party may arrange a controversy, or a position as between two men; but come to handle hundreds of thousands of men—nations, solar systems, constellations innumerable, and we can have no compromising, temporising, giving and taking on a small scale, so as to balance the pride of all parties; there must be sovereignty, fiat,—the "let it be" out of which all smaller imperatives are struck, like sparks from an infinite flame.

Faith in the divine appointment could alone secure religious contentment under such circumstances. This is as necessary to-day, in view of the distribution of men, with their various gifts and their endlessly varied vocations. What is that mystic, subtle, nameless power that keeps society together, with its diversities, antagonisms, and contradictions? What is the astronomical force that so whirls society around an invisible centre as to sink the mountains into plains and lift up the valleys to a common level? Have we not to-day precisely this order in society intellectually,—Judah first, Reuben second, Ephraim third, Dan hindmost? This is not ancient history: it is the military rule and law of the passing time. Men cannot alter it. Ambition attempts to change relations and positions, and ambition dies in the abortive effort. The Lord will have his way in the whirlwind and in the fire and the storm. To deny it is to waste words; to contend against it is “to kick against the pricks”; to say “We will not have this Man to reign over us,” is to utter an empty gasconade—a brag that bursts with its own swelling. We are standing in the region of law; we are bounded on every side. Every man has his gift, into the use of which the King will inquire when he comes back from the far country. How is it that men, being first, second, third, and hindmost in the matter of circumstances, are still knit together by a mysterious bond? The rich man cannot do without the poor man; the palace has its kitchen; the throne has its retinue of attendants, and if one be absent the harmony of the service is impaired. We, being many members, are one body; the hand cannot say to the foot—“I have no need of thee”; nor can the ear say to the eye, nor the eye to the ear—“I have no need of thee.” Yet some parts are honourable, and some dishonourable; some comely, some uncomely. How is this? Marvellous if society made itself!—requiring quite a miraculous infidel to believe that it invented its own harmony. “The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice.”

Order is but another word for purpose, or another word for mind. This mechanism was not self-invented or self-regulated; behind this military table of position and movement is the God of the whole universe. He is behind everything. It requires the whole Trinity to sustain the tiny insect that trembles out its

little life in the dying sunbeam ; even that frail heart does not throb by having some small portion of the divine energy detached to attend to its affairs. Were there but one man in all the universe, he could only subsist by the omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence of the Triune God. The Cross was not built for millions, but for the sinner, though he be the solitary offender in creation. We see in everything that the amount of order which is represented suggests the extent and quality of the mind behind it. Acknowledging this in things earthly and human, why should we deny the doctrine in relation to things not local, not human, and not transient ? Singular, if order means so much in little things, but means nothing in great affairs ! A marvellous thing, we say, is a book. There are in an English book but some six-and-twenty letters ; a most marvellous thing if some skilled printer, shaking the six-and-twenty letters out of his box, let them fall into the shape of "Paradise Lost" ! Might such a miracle occur ? The world is amazed by the majesty of the poem ; the world devotes monumental brass and marble to bear to other ages the name of the poet who so arranged the letters. A most wonderful thing, then, if six-and-twenty letters cannot shape themselves into a poem, or be shaped by some magical toss of the mechanician's hand, that man, woman, and child, of all grades, and classes, and varieties of tongue, gifts, genius, and all stars and systems and constellations, should have rolled themselves into position and kept together in their magnificence without any mind, reason, or purpose, being above, below, or around, to account for and interpret into higher meanings the massive consolidation ! The more exquisite the mechanism, the more valuable the result of its working. What a mechanism is the world ! How the earth rolls on in the midst of all its revolutions and burials and tragedies ! The same world, yet not the same two moments together, having a permanent quantity centralised in the very heart of changing phenomena. The wise man looks for the permanent quantity ; he is not a mere grubber amongst details and appearances and fleeting thoughts and complexions : he says,—Under all this is something that abides. To find out the eternal quantity is the philosophy of history and the philosophy of religion. We may know much about details, and yet

know nothing about the very thing which brings them into order and flushes them with the colour of moral purpose and meaning. Who knows most about the history of England : the man who has been in every market-town, who knows the market day of every borough, the name of every village, the departure and arrival of every train, the name of every mayor in every municipality ; or the man who knows England by its conquests, its sovereigns, the philosophy of its legislation, the measure of its progress, its relation to other kingdoms, the general set and purpose of its civilisation, but who knows nothing of any market-town in the whole country ? We assign the superiority at once. A country is not an affair of market-towns, and comings and goings of trains, and changes of local officers ; it is a genius, a spirit, a purpose, and to find that is to find out the true history of the land. It is so with Providence, with the Almighty Rulership that is above us and around us. We are affrighted by details, pained by cases of personal suffering, and are at a loss to reconcile individual anecdotes with the beneficence of a universal Providence ; but we must look for the central and eternal quantity—and that is plainly written in all history and in all enlightened consciousness : the sum of it was never so grandly expressed as by the Pauline eloquence—"All things work together for good to them that love God"—that are in the rhythm and majesty of the divine music. Let us not be traders in details, puzzle-makers amid the little occurrences of the parish, but students in the temple of wisdom, worshippers at the throne of light, recognising eternity amid the fluctuation and the tumult of time.

Dan was to go hindmost. The hindmost position has its advantages. It is a rule in the higher criticism that a critic, on looking at a picture, shall first look for its beauties. That rule we have not yet introduced into the Church ; but that is the rule in all the higher life of civilisation. The critic, looking at the picture, first inquires into the beauties, the fascinations, the marks of ability, the signature of genius ; and then reluctantly suggests the drawback or the point of inferiority, and submits it rather for consideration than for judgment. We ought, surely, to look so upon the picture of Providence, the map of human life, the marvellous academy of society. We ought oftentimes to pity

the foremost men. The greater the statesman, the greater the responsibility he has to sustain ; the greater the genius, the more poignant its occasional agonies ; the more sensitive the nature, the more is every wound felt, the more is every concussion regarded with fear. The foremost soldiers will be in battle first ; we who are hindmost may have only to shout the hosanna of victory. Judah is first, and may have first to fight ; Dan is hindmost, and may take some pride in Judah's victories. The pioneer traveller has the hardships to undergo ; he was first in honour, but he was first in suffering. We travel on the road he made. This age is the hindmost in procession of time ; is it therefore the inferior age ? The nineteenth century comes after all the eighteen ; but it therefore comes on the firmer ground, with the larger civilisation, with the ampler library, with the more extended resources ; it comes with a thousand-handed ability because it is the hindmost of the days. Take this view of all circumstances, and life will become a joy where it has long been a pain ; our very disqualifications in one direction may become qualifications in another. If you had been fit for more field work, you could not have read so much ; if your health had been more robust, your spirit might have been coarser ; through the feebleness or the restraint of the body you became acquainted with processes of chastening and limitation and refinement which have made you your noblest self. There is no lot that has not in it some point of light ; if, indeed, we except men who have sinned away their day and are now in the wilderness of despair, still enough remains to justify the reassertion that in every human lot there are points of advantage. Let no man glory over another ; God has set everyone in his place, and every man must accept the divine appointment. But this was Old Testament ; we have supposedly outlived the venerable record. Is there anything to correspond with this order of the camps in the New Testament ? Read 1 Corinthians xii. 28-30 : "And God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles ? are all prophets ? are all teachers ? are all workers of miracles ? Have all the gifts of healing ? do all speak with tongues ? do all interpret ?" This is the Old Testament translated into later language. So is

this: "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. . . For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." Paul, then, was but Moses evangelised; the God of both Testaments is the same. The great mischief is, that one man is so often expected to be all men. This is particularly so in the Church. Outside the Church we have some little tincture of common sense in these matters; but inside the Church we have another kind of sense. We thus declaim: The minister is an excellent visitor, but he is a very poor preacher. A marvellous thing it would have been, now, if the same man had been both a preacher and a visitor! Or we say: No doubt he is a very learned theologian, but he has no gift in the relation of anecdotes. A marvellous thing if he had been great in the theological metaphysics of the fathers, and profound in his knowledge of anecdotes that never transpired! Or: He is very solid, but not entertaining. Marvellous if he had been as solid as a Quarterly Review, and as great a liar as an evening newspaper! In the Old Testament and in the New Testament there was some regard to specialty of gift, to definiteness of position; having lost that regard we have lost power. You do not say, The clock is an excellent time-keeper, but no use at all as a musical instrument. You do not take up a trumpet and say, A finer instrument was never made to call men to feast or to battle, but it is utterly useless if you want it to tell you the time of day. Every man in his own place, in his sphere. The great question is not in what regiment we are, but rather, Are we in the army of Christ—whether with Judah first, with Reuben second, with Ephraim third, or with Dan the hindmost tribe? To be in the army is the great consideration. There are no inferior positions in the Church; there are no inferior clergy. There may be valleys;

but the valleys are in the Alps—even the depressed places are on the high mountains; to be on those mountains at all is to be in an elevated position. We have the same regulation in the New Testament, as Paul has just proved. We need not have gone to Paul, for Paul was but an echo, not a voice; the Voice is Christ. The Son hath revealed the Father as a King who has gone into a far country, and before going divided to his servants, severally as he would, to one five talents, to another two, to another one, saying to each "Occupy till I come." So the Book of Numbers is but an earlier edition of the book by which Christian conduct is regulated and Christian education is completed. So the Bible has many writers, but only one Author. The hands that shaped its letters are many; the Spirit that revealed its truth is One.

NOTE.

THE Book of Numbers is rich in fragments of ancient poetry, some of them of great beauty, and all throwing interesting light on the character of the times in which they were composed. Such, for instance, is the blessing of the high-priest (vi. 24-26):—

"Jehovah bless thee and keep thee:
Jehovah make his countenance shine upon thee,
And be gracious unto thee:
Jehovah lift up his countenance upon thee,
And give thee peace."

Such, too, are the chants which were the signal for the Ark to move when the people journeyed, and for it to rest when they were about to encamp:—

"Arise, O Jehovah! let thine enemies be scattered:
Let them also that hate thee flee before thee."

And,

"Return, O Jehovah,
To the thousands of the families of Israel!"

In chapter xxi. we have a passage cited from a book called "The Book of the Wars of Jehovah." This was probably a collection of ballads and songs composed on different occasions by the watch-fires of the camp, and for the most part, though not perhaps exclusively, in commemoration of the victories of the Israelites over their enemies. The title shows us that these were written by men imbued with a deep sense of religion, and who were therefore foremost to acknowledge that not their own prowess, but Jehovah's Right Hand had given them the victory when they went forth to battle. Hence it was called, not "The Book of the Wars of Israel," but "The Book of the Wars of Jehovah." Possibly this is the book referred to in Exodus xvii. 14, especially as we read (v. 16) that when Moses built the altar which he called Jehovah-Nissi (Jehovah is my banner), he exclaimed, "Jehovah will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." This expression may have given the name to the book.

Numbers vi. 22-27.

22. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
23. Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them,
24. The Lord bless thee, and keep thee :
25. The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee :
26. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.
27. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel ; and I will bless them.

BENEDICTION.

WE have need of some such message as this ; we needed a Sabbath day in the weary week of detail and mechanical arrangement and service of the hand through which we have been steadily passing. We know the Sabbath when it comes ; we feel the Sabbatic air of this tender benediction. We dare not trifle with these words, were they anonymous ; had we found them in some out-of-the-way place, when our hearts were weary and our eyes were red with tears, we should have blessed the unknown writer of music so sweet and tender. In some high mood of strength and passion we might not have heeded the words ; but with a broken spirit, strength nearly exhausted, hope just expiring, the clouds closing thickly upon life, we should have pressed the writing to our lips and kissed back our thanks for the blessing which it brought. This is how the Bible appeals to us ; it waits for our moods ; it does not force food upon the sated appetite ; it keeps back the bread until the hunger claims it, and then its hospitality is as great as our necessity. Reading the sweet passage, we seem to have come into a new clime. Now and again in the Old Testament there are surprises of beauty ; there are words of gentleness in it not touched in their exquisite sublimity by anything in the New Covenant. Would you cull and gather into floral groups,

sweet words, tender expressions, gracious solaces, syllables that find their way into the heart's night and bitterness? For this you must go to the Old Testament. The Hebrew tongue was made for comfort, for a great redundancy of solace; there is wine in the grape of every syllable; he who presses most in the agony of his need will drink most abundantly and most refreshingly of the wine of God's love. It is right that the Old Testament should have its supremacies; it should not always be a cumbrous ritual, an intricate and expensive mechanism; now and again, it should, so to say, overtop even the New Testament, and claim to be the inspired Book of God, by the way in which it speaks to the heart's wounds and all the agonies of human life. We have waited for this blessing; we felt there was something coming to us when we saw God marking out the land, laying down the plan of the hedges, fixing the gates and swinging them on golden hinges; when we noted what we may call his anxiety that the garden should be properly laid out according to the best geometry, we said in our hearts,—he means to grow sweet fruit here; all these pains and cares about hedges, and gates, and paths, and positions must be interpreted into the purpose to grow such fruit on this soil as never grew beyond the lines of paradise. So the very detail has been to us prophetic; the mechanism has had a flush about it which told that love was not very far away. We come fully into the sanctuary at this moment: here is "blessing," "keeping," "shining,"—the uplifting upon our poor life of all heaven's glad morning. We expected it; when we saw God troubled, if we may so say, with such anxiety about the frame, the shape, the overlaying with gold, the loops by which it was to be hung, we said in our hearts, he means to put into this frame such a picture as there is not to be found outside the galleries of heaven. Here is the picture: a picture of benediction, and joyousness chastened into peace; say if on all the walls of the world there gleams a picture charged with such suggestion of colour, such vitality, such expressiveness, such mute eloquence. The heart knows when the Bible is completed; the spirit that is in man—part of the Spirit of God—knows when to say, with grateful content, "It is finished." This is the end at the very beginning; much history has yet to be evolved, worked out in intricate detail

revealed in perplexing contradiction, made evident by agonising tragedy; but when the tumultuous music has ceased, it will express itself in this very benediction. In God, in heaven, in all the solemn eternity, there is no word greater than *peace*. It was Christ's gift; it is a peace which "passeth all understanding"; it seizes for its explanation all figures that suggest light, beauty, comfort, strength, security, completeness; it is not a single element, it is the combination of all forces, their final and infinite reconciliation.

This is the Lord's prayer. We have by some means, not always easy of explanation, fixed upon another formula and clothed it with the dignity of being the Lord's prayer. The Lord's prayer occurs early in the Lord's Book. This is not a human invention; we do not read that Aaron spake unto Moses saying, I have conceived a formula of benediction which will please the hosts of Israel. It is the Lord himself who brings this flower out of the upper paradise; it is the Lord's own dear self that brings this bar of music from heaven's infinite anthem. This is the Lord's doing, outshining the sun, outvaluing the gold of the tabernacle, and coming into the heart with a sanctity that turns the whole life into one long Sabbath day.

Being the Lord's prayer, it is a *complete* prayer. God works by the circle; he is not satisfied with the abrupt straight line, or even with its endless monotony. He completes in geometric as in moral beauty what is needed for the comfort and inspiration of human life. "The Lord bless thee." Explain the word *bless*. You cannot; it explains itself. It will not condescend to be broken up into words capable of being totalised into its exact value; it floats about the life like a perfume; it touches the weak, weary life like a great soft hand, lifting it up into new strength; it whispers its messages into the soul's ear when other voices could not reach the attention of the spirit. A child knows what the word *bless* means, in effect, though it cannot explain the term: in other words, it knows the touch of love, it knows the coo of pleasure that enters into the congratulatory or encouraging tone. There is a masonry of hearts; there is a "touch of nature." Who does not know when the voice is charged with gospel, and when it is choked with thunder

and judgment? Magnify the word *bleſs*: it will ſtretch over the whole firmament; gather around it all jewels ſymbolic, ſuggeſtive, invaluable, and it can wear them all, and call them trifles when compared with its own ſublimity: they ſit well upon it, for nothing can overpower that word by external decoration. "The Lord . . . keep thee,"—another word of one ſyllable. "Keep thee,"—what means the expreſſion?—gather thee to his heart, put his arms around thee, keep the gate of thy city, watch the fountain of thy pleaſure, take care of thee altogether, watch thy down-ſitting, thine up-riſing, thine outgoing, thine incoming, as if theſe were matters of profound concern to his heart. Surely this is the New Teſtament in the Old? The very Chriſt of God, when he cometh, can have no ſpeech to make deeper than this. Hiſtory has verified this forecast, for when he came the ſong was, "Peace on earth," and when he left the valediction was, "Peace, I leave with you."

This is an answer to prayer. Being a prayer inſpired, it is answered by the very fact of its inſpiration. God never teaches a prayer that he may deny its petition. All true prayer is its own answer. Therein profound miſtakes have been made, and angry and uſeleſs controverſies have raged amongſt men. We do not wait for answers: we at once receive them, as Daniel did, "while we are yet ſpeaking." True, we offer many words that are not prayers, and for answers to ſuch clamour we may have long to wait, for God has no purpoſe of replying to them. Other prayers are reſreſhing to the intellect, ſtirring to the beſt ambitions of the ſoul, ſatisfactory to many of the inſtincts and impulses of life; but they begin and end within the ſuppliant himſelf. True prayer is answered before it is uttered. True prayer is the Lord's prayer, and the Lord answers none but himſelf: herein is that ſaying true—"God cannot deny himſelf." If we will pray our own prayers, we muſt be content without divine replies; if we will wait for the prayer, we ſhall never have to wait for the answer. The Lord's prayer is a ſimple and loving deſire to be loſt in the Lord's will. We do not pray for fine weather for harveſting—nor for fine weather for the voyage—in any ſenſe that interpoſes our ſuppoſed goodneſs between heaven and earth, as if we were more careful about the

harvest than God is, or as if we cared more for the voyager's life than does the Creator of that life and the Redeemer of it. Even such prayers as these—for bright sunshine, for south-west winds to dry the ripening corn,—we conclude with this part of the Lord's prayer,—“Nevertheless not our will, but thine, be done.” No man learns that prayer on the first day of his regeneration, or in the early experiences of his life. Every man must pass through a period of impulse, impatience, vehement desire for some decision which he supposes will bring tranquillity; but after long travail, after a million disappointments have stung the soul, after experiences whose dominating colour is the blackness of utter night, after one hour in sad Gethsemane,—then a man prays and gets answers to prayer. As soon as we can say, “Not my will but thine be done”—doubling up our strength in humiliation and weakness—an angel will appear, strengthening us, and setting us up in the posture of dignity and in the attitude of conquest. Still, do not stop the flow of other speech; it does us good to talk up to heaven, to say what our requests are, to name them one by one; and that will become prayer if finished properly; in itself it is mere clamour—a noise of words with irreligious and ineffective fluency; but when ended with “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done”—through that exclamation comes the Divine benediction.

This is a prayer that suits all life. The universality of doctrines proves their inspiration. We cannot have a local gospel; we could not tolerate a book that could only be translated into one language. Ritual, tabernacles, colours, jewellery for the inner place of the sanctuary, and priestly robings,—all must fall off as local and temporary, and, by so much, worthless. But here is a benediction that can go all the world over and fill the ages with its tenderness, and can give all the time without being itself impoverished. Every heart may utter it. “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee,”—why it is the music of farewells to-day. Did ever parent send the child out from home without saying, if not in words, yet in feeling, “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee”? Did ever friend speak to friend, ailing and sick unto death, at night time, without saying, “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: . . . and give thee peace”? Amend the

terms! you who are gifted in speech, you who have learning in the use of phrases,—amend these sentences, displace them by purer music! To that challenge there can be no reply. This is refined gold: all other speech is gilded; this is the pure lily: all competing flowers are made of pliable wax. This is the speech of God; every letter may conclude with it; every day may begin with it; every night may be sanctified by it. Grammatical difficulty there is none; criticism has no place here; the rudest soul is at least silent in the presence of this holy image, and the most stubborn unbeliever almost wishes the words might speak to his own weariness.

This is a mysterious prayer. The sacred Name occurs three times. Without being unduly anxious to found any doctrine upon the threefold repetition of the sacred designation, is there not a suggestion here of the Great Tri-Unity? Are not all the Christian benedictions founded upon these three lines? Do we not invoke the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, in our own words of blessing when we close the day spent at the sanctuary? Do not seek texts, or force passages of Scripture beyond the lines and boundaries intended by the Holy Spirit; yet do not shrink from finding suggestion where you can find it rationally, obviously, without straining—where the suggestion comes to you, rather than you carry some stern dogma to the words themselves. Is not all blessing threefold? Is there not some kind of even rhetorical magic in the number three?—an odd number; yet does it not come with evenness of rhythm, when rightly applied in human speech? Does it not fall into unity, as drops splash into the river as if they belonged to that flowing stream? Has not the Father a blessing of his own, and Christ a tender word that none but he can speak, and the Holy Spirit a breathing more eloquent than articulate language?

But the light suggests the shade: Is there an unblest life? Is it possible that there can be humanity without the divine dew resting upon it? Not in the purpose of God. "God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." But the possibility is that a man may exclude himself from the blessing, and live an unblest life. It is possible to outlive even the blessing of human love—possible so to vitiate all purity, desecrate

all sanctity, violate every obligation, as that our steadiest friend is kept back by an intelligent reluctance from breathing any blessing on our name. Who will live the unblest life? None need do so. Let every one say,—Bless me, even me also, O my Father. Let the man farthest away say,—I will arise, and go to my Father,—and his first returning step means benediction, release from the past, an unburdening of the soul, an adoption into the redeemed and sanctified family. Let all hearts seek a blessing; let every man say,—Unless thy blessing go with me, carry me not up hence; give me God's blessing, and my poorest day in the market-place will make me rich in heart at least; and my most successful day on the battle-field of life, in the controversies of time, in the competitions of commerce, in the rivalries of literature, will be made the richer by an incalculable addition; let me live the life of the righteous, then shall I die the death of the righteous, and my last end shall be the beginning of my immortal youth.

Numbers ix. 15-23.

15. And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony : and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning.

16. So it was alway : the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night.

17. And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed : and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents.

18. At the commandment of the Lord the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched : as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents.

19. And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the Lord, and journeyed not.

20. And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle ; according to the commandment of the Lord they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the Lord they journeyed.

21. And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed : whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed.

22. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not : but when it was taken up, they journeyed.

23. At the commandment of the Lord they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed : they kept the charge of the Lord, at the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses.

THE JOURNEY OF LIFE.

A VERY noble life ! a wonderful sense of comfort and security in it ; a marvellous childlikeness of spirit and trust, expectation and hope ! We have not advanced beyond this. We may, in a sense, be cleverer, abler,—the production of a more intricate civilisation ; but we have not advanced beyond this sweet trustfulness, this calm of heart, this religious and sacred tranquillity. There is no strain upon the imagination in thinking

of life as a journey. That is one of the simplest and most beautiful figures by which the action of life can be represented. We are travellers; we are here but for a little time; on our feet are sandals and in our hands are staves; here we have no continuing city, and we are called upon to testify to the age that we seek a country out of sight. So then, we are familiar with the figure; it commends itself to us, as life enlarges, as quite expressive of the reality of the case;—every day a milestone, every year so much nearer the end. At first the miles appear so many and so long; then, at a certain period of life, the miles are but a handful, and as for their length, it is the one dimension of which they are destitute. To the child, the year is a life—a quite immeasurable quantity; to the man in mid-life and passing beyond a certain point, the year is a breath, a shadow, quickly flying,—it will be gone whilst we are talking about it; and in that mood of mind, how pensive and tender, how solemn and rousing, the music: “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.”

Regarding life, then, as a journey, according to the pattern of this text, is there not a mysterious presence or influence in life which really affects our action? In the text that influence is spoken of as a cloud by day and a fire by night,—two striking natural images. Our controversy is not about the image, or the metaphor: behind it is there not this ever-abiding solemnity, that in life there is a mysterious action—a ministry we cannot comprehend, an influence we cannot overrule? At this moment we need not determine its name: at the outset of the inquiry there is no occasion to perplex the mind by a choice of religious terms; let us first admit that in life there is a mystery—a movement we cannot reckon in its totality, or fix in given boundaries; something that is greater than our thought, and that yet comes into it with illuminating and ennobling energy. We speak of “impression.” When we think of changing our position in life, we say we have an *impression*. What is an impression? Who created it? Who determined its meaning? How do you account for the impression? Upon what is the impression made?—upon the mind, upon something subtler than itself, upon the consciousness, the soul, the spirit—the innermost man. That is a mystery! We will speak the non-religious language for the moment and

talk of "impression." There you have a riddle, a difficulty ; you cannot explain it. You have a consciousness of its presence ; but how it came to be what it is, and how it came to act when it did, you cannot explain in words. Or we speak of "circumstances." We say that *circumstances* seem to point in this direction or in that. What are circumstances ? Where do they begin ? How do they sum themselves up into influence, or into definiteness ? How many of them are required to constitute a determining presence in human life ? Do we first make the circumstances and then worship them ?—then we are but idolaters. Do we create the conditions which we suppose are favourable to our thought and our destiny, and then, having created the conditions, regard them as significant of the course which we ought to take ? In proportion as you create the circumstances, you must, in your inmost soul, distrust them. You know you shaped the course you follow ; you know you first created the conditions, and then construed them so as to affect beneficially certain selfish issues. The reasoning is sophistical ; the reasoning is, indeed, immoral. Having spoken about "impression" and "circumstances," we speak about another mysterious thing which has come to be known by the name of "tendency." We say the *tendency* of things is— ; or the *tendency* of life seems to indicate—. We have created a species of rhythm, or harmonic movement, falling into which we say,—This is the sweep of tendency, and to resist tendency is impossible. How anxious we are to get rid of religious names ! Men who will speak of impression, circumstances, and tendency, will hesitate before saying,—Providence, God, Father in heaven. Who is ashamed to speak about impression, circumstances, tendency ? These are words we can use everywhere without committing ourselves to anything definite in the way of religious faith. Let the Church beware how it gives up the grand old names—God, Providence, heavenly direction, spiritual influence ! We have exchanged these terms for a meaner currency. We must go back to them and not be afraid of the noble utterance. It may bring us into criticism from the other side, which has nothing kind to say about the noblest truth ; but when we utter such language, being at the time faithful to our convictions, we shall find satisfaction in our own hearts—a deep, rich, generous

satisfaction, knowing that we have not been ashamed of him who is our Shepherd and Guide and Friend, saying,—“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

Why shrink from the definite religious testimony of the eighteenth verse: “At the commandment of the Lord the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched”? We speak of definite testimony: here it is. When a man rises in the morning in God’s strength, lies down at night in God’s blessing, walks all day in God’s energy, he lives and moves and has his being in God; he is lost in God; God is in his inmost thought, and every word upon his tongue is an implied or actual confession of childlike trust in God. We need not be ashamed of this definite testimony. It exalts human life. What is the meaning of it? Evidently that our life is recognised by God, our movements are of some consequence to him; he knows our downsitting and our uprising, our going out and our coming in; and there is not a word upon our tongue, there is not a thought in our heart, but, lo, it is known wholly in heaven. Realise that idea; you are not degraded by it, or servilely limited by it: on the contrary, you are lifted up into a nobler self-hood; life becomes a daily sacrament, and the sacrament a daily revelation. A conviction of this kind destroys superstition. The only destroyer of superstition, in any profound and lasting sense, is real religion—a simple, strong grasp of realities. I call the non-religious man superstitious, if he is the victim of impressions, circumstances, tendencies,—if he is always trying to piece together the accidents of the day, and to shape them into some guiding presence and meaning. Where is his point of rest? He is lost in petty details; he has no altar—that is to say, no grand centre of life, the point where he is his noblest self because most humbled before the Living God. Have no fear of the suggestion of superstition in your religious life. The only true rationalism is true religion; it is reason sanctified, reason glorified, reason taken into communion and friendliest fellowship with God. They are superstitious who know not where to build their altar, how to pray when it is built; who have no way into the Infinite opened up and marked by precious blood. They who consult oracles of their own creation, and are looking wistfully and vaguely round for signs of the times or signs of the

spaces—these astrologers are superstitious ; but the man—great, strong, noble, healthy man—who clasps his hands, closes his eyes, and says in childlike tones—“ Father, guide me every day,” is not a superstitious man but really healthy in soul,—a man to be trusted, a man whose quality at the last will prove itself to be all gold. This consciousness of divine guidance in life, divine care of life, divine redemption of life, necessitates prayer. The man who seizes this view of things must pray. In no long words may he pray ; in no connected sentences flowing through hours need he importune the heavens ; the uplifting of an eye is prayer, the falling of a tear may be prayer, a sigh for which there are no fit words may be prayer ;—this is praying without ceasing, having that readiness and instancy of mind which flies into heaven when the cloud threatens, when the enemy is at hand, when the perplexity thickens into a baffling mystery ; then prayer is sweet. Prayer is natural to the child of God ; it is a touch, a smile of the heavenly face, a written revelation inscribed upon the tablets of the heart which the soul can read and understand and the will gladly obey. To be without that is to be in perpetual darkness and in continual pain.

This religious view of life brings the spirit into the restfulness and blessed joy of obedience. The children of Israel simply obeyed. If the cloud tarried long, they rested long ; if the cloud were taken up suddenly, they moved without surprise ; when the cloud abode from the even unto the morning, then they abode with it ; when it rose, they rose with its ascension ; “ whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle . . . the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not.” Theirs was not a life of controversy ; ours, unhappily, is. We have made it a life of controversy when we need not. We are always arguing with our orders ; we are trying to construe them into different and inferior meanings ; we are wasting life by discussing in idle words, which can settle nothing, the gravity and authority of our marching orders. If we accept God’s Book, do let us accept it with full trust, not as a field for criticism, but as a code of life—the word, or the testimony by which every thought, feeling, and action is to be determined. Live that life and risk your destiny. If that life will not at the last overthrow the enemy, extract his sting and

taunt the grave in rapturous triumph, nothing known to me can meet that final and tremendous necessity. To obey is to live. To look every morning for the marching order of the day is to be master of the day. He who opens the gate of the day with the key of prayer is master of the situation ; though the day be full of difficulty, the spirit's rest will not be disturbed ; though there be many things to make the day cloudy and turn it almost into a black night, yet in the soul there will be a light which nothing can dim, a fire which no sea can quench, a deep, holy, un murmuring, expectant trust in the Living God. Where then is fear—fear of man ? There is none. Where is anxiety ? There is none. The soul is in heaven, rather than upon earth, in all matters which concern its deepest necessities and its final meanings. Have no marching orders, have no Living God, have no trust in Heaven ; and then fear will occupy the mind, anxiety will be like a canker in the heart, a mysterious expectation of something distressing will disenoble every faculty, and life will be turned into a jugglery, a species of gambling, not knowing what will occur. Who will accept that policy of life ? Not one, surely, but the fool. Rather let it be ours to look up, to hope on : for in so doing we are not spending our time in foolish contemplation ; or in a mental absorption which admits of no practical expression ; we are gathering strength for the daily fight, wisdom for the daily mystery, and contentment for the daily lot. Let me live the life of the righteous, let me die the death of the righteous ; my last estate will be like his. The “last end” we must face ; we can come to it in one of two ways : self-idolatrously, self-trustingly, having the fearlessness of mere boasting, mere defiance ; or we can come to it trusting that things are larger than they look, deeper than they seem, believing that our sin was answered by the Lamb of God even before it was committed—for he was slain from before the foundation of the world. We can come to our last end believing that God knows us altogether, remembers our frame, knows how frail we are, has seen our loving trust in his Son Jesus Christ ; and I should say that the man who comes to his last end in that spirit is not only a Christian but a philosopher—that he need not take rank amid the inferiorities of his age, but may stand at the front, having seen, by the grace of God, the meaning of life,

the mystery of sin, the grandeur of redemption, the certainty of the fatherhood of God. Suppose we rise to that spirit—what then? Is the world of no consequence to us? The world is of all the more consequence to us; we can be in the world, and yet not of it; we can handle it with a steadier mastery, because we come down upon it from the highest heights of spiritual communion. Only he who really knows the Spirit of Christ can be a true lover and helper of mankind. Others may try to help and to love; others will invent theories and try new schemes and set up various institutions; but they will perish in their own action, because there is no fountain sufficiently copious to feed the current of their motive. But he who stands back in the consciousness of Christ's personality, reality, and Christ's love of the world—a love that shrank not from death; he who has the mind of Christ will live the helpful life; he will feel that nothing has been done while anything remains to be accomplished; every fatherless child will be his, every weak and deserving cause will belong to his care; the whole world will be too small for a love kindled by the love of the Son of God. We have committed ourselves to this policy. We know the other way of life; we know we can attempt to do without the religious principle; we can attempt to do without prayer or the recognition of divine ministries and influences; we have deliberately and for ever left that side. Do not speak to us as if we had no experience of the atheistic way of living; do not regard us as innocent and simpering inquirers who have not yet known the mystery and the grandeur of atheism. We know what it is to be in a temple without a God, to pass by an altar without a sacrifice, to take our own life into our own keeping; we have done it, and to-day we return, saying, each for himself,—How many servants in my Father's house have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my Father, and tell him all the tale of sin and sorrow, and if he will admit me into the lowest room in the house, it will be better than being outside amidst all this deprivation, weariness, emptiness, sadness, guilt. We have left the other way of living; we tried it, and found it false; we were allured by its fascinations, and found they were mocking voices; we tried to do without God, and our life withered at the roots. We have now returned to the Shepherd

and Bishop of our souls, by the grace of God and the ministry of God the Holy Ghost; and having come back, we say to every man who is yet outside,—Ho, every one that thirsteth, come, we have a Gospel to preach, and we are not ashamed of its simplicity or of its glory.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, lead us in thine own way, and the end will be rest. We know nothing of the way ourselves, except that it is often long and weary, and much trying to every failing power; but thou knowest the road—all of it; it is not one mile too long. Lead thou us, and we shall be safe; carry us when we are weary, and give us rest according to thine own will and the measure of our need. We bless thee for the way out of time, out of all its perplexities and sorrows; and we bless thee for all the grace, day by day, whereby we are enabled to bear every perplexity and find in it a mysterious joy, and pass under all thy varied discipline and find in it holy meaning and gracious intent—a very mystery of love. We will not go without thy presence; without thy presence there is no light, there is no joy, there is no peace; except thy presence go with us carry us not up hence. Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Chasten our impatience; show us that we are blind and cannot see afar off, that we were born yesterday and to-morrow we die, that it is ours to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him. This we have learned of Jesus Christ thy Son; we knew it not until we received his Spirit into our hearts; we were brought to this resignation by way of the Cross; we have learned in all things to rest in God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. So now, we stand still, and see the salvation of God; we are in no haste, in no fever of anxiety; in our hearts is the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, and our life is a long waiting, or a glad service, for Christ. We can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us; he hath done all for us: we are his debtors: we have nothing that we have not received. We would live unto him who died for us and rose again. Amen.

Numbers x. 1-10.

1. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
2. Make thee two trumpets of silver ; of a whole piece shalt thou make them : that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps.
3. And when they shall blow with them, all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.
4. And if they blow but with one trumpet, then the princes, which are heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee.
5. When ye blow an alarm, then the camps that lie on the east parts shall go forward.
6. When ye blow an alarm the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall take their journey : they shall blow an alarm for their journeys.
7. But when the congregation is to be gathered together, ye shall blow, but ye shall not sound an alarm.
8. And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow with the trumpets ; and they shall be to you for an ordinance for ever throughout your generations.
9. And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets ; and ye shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies.
10. Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings ; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God : I am the Lord your God.

THE TRUMPETS OF PROVIDENCE.

MOSES was commanded to make two trumpets of silver. They were to be used in calling the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps. The trumpets were to be sounded in different ways. When one trumpet was blown, then the princes were to gather themselves unto Moses ; when an alarm was blown, the camps were to move ; when the congregation was to be gathered together, the trumpets were to be blown, but so blown as not to sound an alarm. The trumpets were to be blown

by the sons of Aaron, the priests. Whether in war or in festival, the trumpets were to be to Israel for a memorial before God. Where are those trumpets? The sacred trumpets are still sounded; they still call men to worship, to festival, to battle. If we have lost the literal instrument, we are still, if right-minded, within sound of the trumpets of Providence. We do not now go out at our own bidding; we are, if wise, responding to a Voice, wherever we may be found. We impoverish ourselves by imagining that God does not now call the people to worship, the camp to war, the family to festival, the Church to victory. Look at the men who are pouring forth in all directions every morning; stand, in imagination, at a point from which you can see all the stations at which men alight; so present the scene to the fancy that you can see every little procession hastening to its given point of departure; then bring on all the processions to the various points of arrival; read the faces of the men; take in the whole scene. What action; what colour; what expression of countenance! And if we had ears acute enough to hear, what various voices are being sounded by every life; what tumult; what desire; what intersection of paths; what imminent collisions!—and yet the whole scene moves on with a kind of rough order all its own. What has called these men together—and yet not together?—the trumpet! That it was not a literal trumpet does not destroy the high poetry of the occasion; the trumpet is the more wonderful that it is not material. These men are not in a trance; they are not night-walkers; they have not been seduced by some dream to come out all at once, wandering hither and thither, not knowing destiny, purpose, or intention. This is a scheme; there is a mind behind all this panorama; it never could settle itself into such order and effect and issue if it were the mere sport of chance. Watch the scene: it is full of pathos, it is loaded with manifold sorrow. An awful sight is a crowd of men; the bustle, the rush, the apparent hilarity cannot hide the tragedy. To what are these men hastening? Explain the scene. Some have heard the trumpet calling to controversy. Many of these men carry bloodless swords; they are well equipped with argument; they are about to state the case, to defend the position, to repel, to assert, to vindicate righteousness, and to claim compensation for virtue

outraged ; they are soldiers ; they have mapped out the battle-field in private ; all their forces have been disposed within the sanctuary of the night, and presently the voice of genius and of eloquence will be heard in high wrangling, in noble contention, that so the wicked may claim nothing that is not his own, and the righteous have the full reward of his purity. They are going to the political arena to adjust the competing claims of nations, or causes ; war is in their eyes ; should they speak, they would speak stridently, with clear, cutting tone, with military precision and emphasis ; they would hold no long parley with men, for they mean the issue to end in victory. Others have heard no such trumpet : they have heard another call—to peaceful business, to daily routine, to duty, made heavy often by monotony, but duty still, which must be done according to the paces and beatings of the daily clock. They cannot resist that voice without resisting themselves. Sometimes they long to be in more active scenes, to vary the uniformity by some dash or enterprise, to startle the blood into a quicker gallop by doing something unusual and startling ; but they are not so called by the trumpet ; they are moved in that direction by some mean passion or unholy rivalry. The trumpet has called them to the culture of fields, to the exchanges and settlements of merchandise, to the business without which the world, in its broadest civilisation, would stand still ; having heard the trumpet, they obey. And other men, in smaller bands,—more aged men,—men who have seen service in the market field, in the political field, in the field of literature,—how go they ? Away towards sunny scenes, quiet meadows, lakes of silver, gardens trimmed with the patience and skill of love. They are men of leisure, men in life's afternoon. The sunbeam has been a trumpet to them ; hearing it, they said,—Who would remain at home to-day ? All heaven calls us out, the great blue arch invites us to hospitality in the fields and woods and by the river-side. All men are obeying a trumpet ; the call is addressed from heaven to earth every morning. We may have outlived the little, straight, silver trumpet, turned up at the ends ; but the trumpet invisible, the trumpet of Providence, the call of Heaven, the awakening strain of the skies,—this we cannot outlive : for the Lord is a Man of war, and must have the battle continued ; the Lord is a Father, and must have the family

constituted in order ; the Lord is a Shepherd, and must have the flocks led forth that they may lie down in the shadow at noonday.

There are other men going forth. Fix yourselves again, in imagination, at a point from which you can see nations moving on as if to some great conference ; they move from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south ;—fair men, men of darker hue ; men speaking our own language, men talking an unknown tongue ; stalwart men, trained, every muscle having been under the touch of culture ; men carrying arms of various names, all meant to be steeped in blood. Have these men come out in some fit of somnambulism ? Are they sleep-walkers ? Is all this an illustration of nightmare ? What is it ? These men have heard a trumpet. Many trumpets have been sounded, and yet in the midst of all the blare and stormy blast there is one clear note. What is the meaning of all this movement of the camps ? Strong nations are called to go out and support weak ones. It is a policy of insanity which says, Take no heed of other people ; let them fight their own battles and settle their own controversies. That is not the spirit of Christ. Every weak nation belongs to the strong one ; every fatherless child belongs to the man who can keep it, and teach it, and guide it. Were nations equal and causes equal, then the foolish talk of leaving men alone might have some point in it. We must not leave the slave and the slave-holder to settle the controversy ; the slave-holder will soon settle it, if it be so left ; it is not an equal fight. Freedom must plant all its soldiers on the field, and strike for weakness and beat down the oppressor and grind him out of existence. Who will speak one word in favour of war ? No Christian man. War can have no purely Christian defence as war. It sometimes becomes a dire necessity ; it is, in very deed, the last appeal. As war, it is not only barbarous and irrational, it is infernal, altogether and inexpressibly deplorable. Yet we cannot read history or study events without seeing that the Lord has not scrupled to call himself "a Man of war," and the sword has had a place in the history of freedom and the development of progress. What Christian men ought to see is, that the cause is good ; that war is the only alternative ; that having exhausted all the pleas of reason, all

the entreaties of persuasion, all the claims of righteousness, all the appeals of pathos, nothing is to be done but to fight the tyrant with his own weapons. The Lord go with the right ; the Lord support the weak ; the Lord comfort those who are suddenly and tragically bereaved. But there is a call to difficulty, a call to battle, a call to sorrow. We must not delude ourselves into the notion that we are only called to Sabbath calm, and the security of the sanctuary, and the delights of the mead, and the summer holiday of the verdant woods filled with sweet music of birds ; we are called to battle, to loss, to die far away from home ; and, rightly accepted, obedience to such a call means heroism upon earth and coronation in heaven.

The trumpets were to be sounded by the priests. The priests are not likely to sound many trumpets to-day. Ministers have been snubbed and silenced into an awful acquiescence with the stronger party. The pulpit should be a tower of strength to every weak cause. Women should hasten to the Church, saying,—Our cause will be upheld there. Homeless little children should speed to the sanctuary, saying,—We will be welcomed there. Slaves running away should open the church door with certainty of hospitality, saying,—The man who stands up in that tower will forbid the tyrant to reclaim me, or the oppressor to smite me with one blow. It was God's ordination that the trumpet should be sounded by the priests—interpreting that name properly, by the teachers of religion, by the man of prayer, by the preachers of great and solemn doctrines ; they are to sound the trumpet, whether it be a call to festival or to battle. We dare not do so now, because now we have house-rent to pay, and firing to find, and children to educate, and customs to obey. Were we clothed in sackcloth, or with camels' hair, and could we find food enough in the wilderness—were the locusts and the honey sufficient for our natural appetites, we might beard many a tyrant, and decline many an invitation, and repel many an impertinent censor ; but we must consider our ways, and balance our sentences, and remember that we are speaking in the ear of various representatives of public opinion and individual conviction. The pulpit has gone down ! It has kept its form and lost its power ; its voice is a mumbling tone, not a great trumpet blast that creates a space for itself, and is heard above

the hurtling storm and the rush of hasty and selfish merchandise. Were ministers to become the trumpeters of society again, what an awakening there would be in the nation! Were every Sabbath day devoted to the tearing down of some monster evil—were the sanctuary dedicated to the denunciation, not of the vulgar crimes which everybody condemns, but the subtle and unnamed crimes which everybody practises, the blast of the trumpet would tear the temple walls in twain! We live in milder times—we are milder people: we wish for restfulness. The priests wish to have it so also,—like priest, like people. The man who comes with a trumpet of festival will be welcomed; the man who sounds an alarm will be run away from by dyspeptic hearers, by bilious supporters, and by men who wish to be let alone—to creep into heaven, and to be as unnoticed there as they were unknown here.

There are trumpets which call us in spiritual directions. They are heard by the heart. They are full of the tone of persuasion—that highest of all the commandments. The heart hears the trumpet on the Sabbath day. The trumpet that could sound an alarm is softened in its tone into a tender entreaty, or a cheerful persuasion, or a promise of enlarged liberty. Everything depends upon the tone. The trumpet may be the same, but the tone is different. We cannot take up the trumpet of the great player and make it sound as he made it. What is it, then, that plays the trumpet? It is the soul. If we knew things as we ought to know them, we should know that it is the soul that plays every instrument, that sings every hymn, that preaches every discourse that has in it the meaning of God and the behest of Heaven. No man can deliver your messages; no man can preach your sermon. Never trust any man to deliver a message for you if you can by any possibility deliver it yourself. The words may be the very words you used, and yet what from you would have been a persuasion, from the lips of another may become almost an insult. Who can put the proper tone into the instrument—make it talk lovingly, soothingly? Who can make the trumpet pronounce a benediction? Only the skilled player whose lessons have been begun, continued, and consummated in heaven. We perish for lack of tone. We have the right doctrine but the

wrong expression; the words are the words of God, but the voice is an iron one—a tongue heavy, and without the subtle emphasis which makes every note a revelation and every tone a welcome. Hear men read what you have written, if you would really see in it some other meaning than what you intended to convey. Ask another man to read the writing for you. Whilst you read it, you read it, with your soul's sympathy and with a purpose in your heart, and the words answer something that is within you, and therefore you imagine that the speech is sphered off into completeness and is resonant with tones of music. Hand it to your friend; let him stand up and read your sermon back to you, and there is no humiliation upon earth equal to the agony of that distress,—every word misunderstood, the emphasis put in the wrong place, words that you shade off to a vanishing point are brought to the front and made to be principal actors upon the scene; and you, with a wounded heart, turn away and say that your word has returned unto you void. But hear some man read who has entered into the very music of your soul, and he brings back a larger sermon than you gave him; he has heard every word; all the minor tones, all the shades of thought have impressed themselves upon his heart, and when he reads you say—"Would God he had first made the speech! Surely the people would have risen and then bowed down and said,—The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God." The same trumpet called to festival and to war; so the Gospel has two tones: it calls lovingly, sweetly, tenderly; and it sounds an alarm, making the night tremble through all its temple of darkness, and sending into men's hearts pangs of apprehension and unutterable fear.

There is another trumpet yet to sound: "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." The trumpet is not lost, then; it is in heaven, where the Ark of the Testimony is, where the Shekinah is, where the Tabernacle of God is. The Apocalypse has taken charge of all the things which we thought were lost. Reading on through the history, we say,—This is evolu-

tion : see how we have dropped off all these elementary, initial, temporary things, and how we have risen up into spirituality and idealism and the freedom of an air which has no boundary lines, no foundations, no beginning, no ending. And as we are talking this religious licentiousness, behold, the Apocalypse comes, and puts before us all the things we thought we had grown away from. Without the Apocalypse, the New Testament would have come to a deadlock ; with the Apocalypse, the whole Bible is reunited, consolidated into a massive consummation, and in the Apocalypse we have tribes—ay, of Judah, and Asher, and Simeon, and Zebulun, of Joseph and Benjamin ; we have censers and altars and significant blood, great lights, mighty voices, marvellous exhibitions of all kinds of strength. It seems as if all the Levitical ritual had been transformed and glorified into some sublimer significance. This is the Book of God. We thought the silver trumpets were lost, and we read,—And at the last, a great trumpet was sounded in heaven, and announcements were made to earth by the trumpet sounded by an angel, and the last battle was convoked by the trumpet of a spiritual trumpeter. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth !

Numbers x. 29-36.

29. And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses, father-in-law, We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you : come thou with us, and we will do thee good : for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.

30. And he said unto him, I will not go ; but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred.

31. And he said, Leave us not, I pray thee ; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes.

32. And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee.

33. And they departed from the mount of the Lord three days' journey : and the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them.

34. And the cloud of the Lord was upon them by day, when they went out of the camp.

35. And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered ; and let them that hate thee flee before thee.

36. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel.

GOSPEL INVITATIONS.

THE standards were all in motion. In the first place ~~there~~ went the standard of the camp of the children of Judah ; immediately following came the standard of the camp of Reuben ; then followed the standard of the camp of the children of Ephraim ; and last of all came the standard of the camp of the children of Dan. When the camps began to move, Moses said unto Hobab, his father-in-law,—We are going now ; everything is set in order for the march ;—“We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you : come thou with us, and we will do thee good : for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” It was a speech of nature. There is a gospel in human feeling. If we could abolish all written

gospels, all doctrinal methods of welcoming and persuading men, there would still remain the gospel of love, sympathy, tenderness, all that is involved in the noblest meaning of the term *nature*. The gospel of heaven is in harmony with this gospel of the heart ; it lifts it up to highest meanings, interprets it into broadest, brightest hopes, sanctifies and purges it of all selfishness and narrowness. This is the hold which the Gospel will always have upon human attention. It appeals to the heart ; it addresses the pain of necessity ; it answers the often-unspoken interrogatories of the soul. Thus it can never fail. Our conceptions of it will be changed ; our methods of arguing it will be done away, being superseded by nobler methods ; but the innermost quantity itself—the central spirit of redemption, love, hospitality—this will remain evermore, because, though we pass away, Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Our years fail, and with them go all methods and plans and schemes of work ; but Christ is the same, and his time is eternity.

A beautiful picture this ! full of modern questioning—a very pattern of inquiry and invitation in a gospel sense. Can we honestly invite men to join us on our life-march ? Consider the question well. Do not involve others in grievous and mournful responsibilities. Do not entreat men to leave what is to them at least a partial blessing, unless you are sure you can replace that enjoyment by purer and larger gladness. Can we honestly, with the full consent of judgment, conscientiousness, and experience, invite men to join us in the way which we have determined to take ? If not, do not let us add the murder of souls to our other crimes. Do not let us, merely for the sake of companionship, involve in ruin innocent men. What is our life-march ? To what place are we journeying ? Who laid its foundation ? Who lighted its lamps ? Who spread its feast ? What is its name ? Are not many men wandering without a destiny ? Is it not too usual to have no map of life, no definite end in view, no location that can be named to pursue day and night until we reach its golden streets ? There is too much of haphazard in our life—not knowing where the night will land us, going forth day by day at a venture, not sure whether it is a mountain or a valley, a garden or a wilderness, with which the day shall close. This is not living ; this is adventure, empiricism,—the very quackery of

wisdom, the very irony and sarcasm of knowledge. Moses knew whither the camps were going ; they were all set in one direction. The divine flame was seen through the immediate cloud, and with eyes fixed upon the glowing point, away went the standards, the confidence of the leaders being in God, and the hope of the people being in the wisdom of the Most High. What is our destiny ? Towards what place are we journeying ? Are we surprised when we see an angel ? or do we say,—This is the satisfaction of expectation ? (Sad, to tears and veriest woe, is the life that has no map, no plan, no purpose,—that is here and there, retracing its steps, prying, wondering, experimenting, frittering away its energy in doing and undoing, in marching and remarching.) All wisdom says,—Determine your course ; have one object in view ; be ruled by one supreme purpose ; and make all circumstances, incidents, and unexpected events, fall into the march and harmony of the grand design. Be careful how you ask people to go along with you. First lay down a basis of sound wisdom. “We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you.” If that be the first sentence, or part of it, the sentence may end in the boldest invitation ever issued by love to the banquet of grace and wisdom. But let us have no adventuring, no foolish or frivolous speculation in life ; let us speak from the citadel of conviction and from the sanctuary of assured religious confidence.

Have we such a view of the end as may make us independent of immediate trials ? Was it all, then, such plain sailing, or easy marching, or garden-tramping, that Moses could invite any stranger to join the march ? Was he not exchanging one wilderness for another ? To what was he inviting his father-in-law ?—to great palaces immediately in front of him ? to a smoking feast ? to rivers of heaven’s own pure wine ? He was inviting the man to march, to the incidents of battle, to the discipline of the day, to circumstances often fraught with trial and pain, disappointment and mockery ; for there were birds in the wilderness that were hooting at Israel, voices in the air taunting the leaders and mocking the priests. When we invite men to join us on the Christian pilgrimage, it must be on the distinct understanding that we are ruling the present by the future. This is precisely the logic of Moses :—“We are journeying

unto the place." The end was indicated—the goal, the destiny of the march ; and that was so bright, so alluring, so glowing with all hospitable colour, that Moses did not see that to-morrow there was to be a battle, or seeing it, already passed the war-field like a victor. This, too, is the Christian logic as laid down by Paul ; the great apostle said,—“ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” He brought “ the power of an endless life ” to bear upon the immediate day : he quieted to-day’s tumult by a sure anticipation of heaven’s peace. This is right reasoning ; this is practical philosophy. There is nothing pleasant in the process : “ No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” Truly we have no special invitation that commends itself by the immediate rest and quiet and release and Sabbath tranquillity which may be enjoyed. The Christian does not call the world to what the world understands by peace and luxury, rest and enjoyment ; these terms are indeed true in the Christian acceptance, but the world has not been educated to receive that acceptance, and to speak in those terms to a world not understanding them, may be to tell lies under the very banner of the Gospel. He who accepts the invitation to march with the Christian camp, accepts a call to service, duty, discipline, pain, disappointment, varied and continual chastisement,—self consideration put down, passion destroyed, self-will rooted out, pride and vanity crushed down under a heavy weight. To join the Christian camp is to begin a process of self-mortification, to undergo all the discipline of self-contempt, and to accept much strain and distress of life. Is this Gospel-preaching ? It is so. Will not this repel men ? It will at first,—it must at first. It is Christ’s method : “ If any man will follow me, let him take up his cross.” How, then, did Jesus Christ encounter the opening difficulties of the road and pass the trial of the cross ? In the same way—for the wisdom of God is unchanging :—he “ had respect unto the recompense of the reward.” “ For the joy that

was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Moses had respect unto the recompense of the reward. Christ saw the end from the beginning; in the very conduct of the battle, he was wearing the conqueror's diadem. We must draw ourselves forward by taking firm hold of the end,—in other words, we must have such a conception of life's destiny as will invigorate every noble motive, stir every sacred passion, and make us more than conquerors in all war and conflict. This was the reasoning of Moses, this was the reasoning of Paul, this was the practice of Christ; and we are not yet advanced enough in true wisdom to modify the terms or readjust and redistribute the conditions.

Moses did not invite Hobab to join merely for the sake of being in the company; he expected service from Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite. He said,—“Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes”—in other words,—Thou knowest the ground so well that thy presence will be of service to us; experience will assist devotion; we are willing to march: we know nothing of the processes of the way: thou understandest the whole country: come with us and be as eyes unto us. Moses showed leadership even there; it was the invitation of a soldier and a legislator and a wise man. Eyes are of inexpressible value in the whole conduct of life; to be able to see, to take note of, to recognise—the man who can do this is rendering service to the whole Church. So we invite men to come with us that they may render service according to their opportunity and capacity. To some men we say,—If you will come, you will supply the music. To others,—you will furnish the inspiration. And to others,—If you come with us, we shall feel the stronger in the security of your presence; there is such massiveness in your character, such solidity in your judgment, such ripeness of experience in your life, that if you will join this march, we shall be your debtors; you will give as well as take; you will bless as well as be blessed.

Did Moses make a mistake here? I fancy so. Could Moses make mistakes? He often did. What then becomes of his inspiration? It is untouched; but Moses often acted in his own name and strength. He is weak here. When he gave the

invitation he was noble : he intended to do the man good ; but when he put in the reason, he showed the incompleteness of his faith. What did he want with Hobab's eyes ? Had he forgotten the Eye that struck off the iron wheels of Egypt's chariots ? For a moment, perhaps, he had. Who can be always his best self ? Who can every day stand on the rock of the Amen of his own great prayers ? Who is there amongst us—prince or priest or strongest man—that does not want some little local assistance ? We are broken down by the wants of the place, by the necessities of the occasion, by the small difficulties of the road. Moses had no difficulty whatever as to the end of the way ; and it is possible for us to have very definite conceptions of heaven, and yet to be asking help on the road from men to whom we should never come in suppliant attitude ; offer to give them something, to do them good, to take them to the place of rest and security ; but who can patronise the camps of Israel ? Who can come in saying,—I am necessary to the march of the Church, to the triumph of those who war in the name of the Lord of hosts ? Abram showed a better mettle ; he said to the king, who offered him hospitality and bounty,—No ; “lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich.” Moses wanted the eyes of a local man to help him, forgetting that God had been to him all eye—a fire by night, a cloud by day,—a veiled eye with the fire trembling under the filament. We all forget these things, and we want a crutch, forgetting the sword is enough ; we want the help of magistrate, or important man, or local celebrity, or wise resident, forgetting that we are in charge of God, that his Spirit is the one fountain of inspiration, and that when we ask for human help, we distress the Providence of God. But this is like us : we do wish the magistrate to help us just a little. We are not altogether independent of the spirit of local respectability : we will go to the little when we might go to the great, to the human when we might go to the divine,—to Hobab when we might go to Jehovah. Take care when you go to men that you ask no favour of them for God's camp ; do not beg for patrons. Die of divinely-appointed starvation—if such discipline there be—rather than accept help which interferes with the completeness of faith in God.

The Church should always offer great invitations. The Church

is not a Church if it be inhospitable. Christ's Church should always have its table spread, its flagons of wine full, and its bounty ready; and it should always be saying,—Still there is room: bring in the hungry guests; inquire not into littlenesses, peculiarities, infirmities, dressings and decorations; but go out into the highways, and the hedges, and compel them to come in. Has the Church lost its power of invitation—sweet welcome, boundless hospitality? Is it not now putting up little toll-gates of its own, and asking questions of approaching guests which Heaven never suggested? Is it using the eyes of Hobab when it might avail itself of the omniscience of God? If you are not giving Christian invitations, other people will give invitations of another kind. Men will not go without invitation; it is for us to say what shall be the quality and range of that invitation. "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: my son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood." Who is to issue invitations to the young? Who is to be boldest and first in the offer of hospitality to the hungry life? The Church ought to be first; the Christian Gospel ought to have the first claim upon human attention. The Spirit and the bride say, Come; let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will. The Gospel is not a mere argument, a petty contest in dubious words; it is a great speech to the sore heart, a glorious appeal unto the broken spirit; an utterance of love to a world in despair. Let us, then, go back to the old methods of welcoming men. With all newness of scheme and method and plan in the conduct of Christian service, never drop out of your speech the tone of invitation, the music of welcome, the broad and generous call to ample—to infinite hospitality.

Numbers xi. 1-3.

1. And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord : and the Lord heard it ; and his anger was kindled ; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.

2. And the people cried unto Moses ; and when Moses prayed unto the Lord, the fire was quenched.

3. And he called the name of the place Taberah : because the fire of the Lord burnt among them.

COMPLAINING OF PROVIDENCE.

THE people complained—and the Lord set fire to them! That seems rough judgment, for what is man's speech as set against the divine fire? We must all agree that this was harsh—utterly and unwarrantably severe, out of all proportion to the temper and intention of the people. The people complained : they were in pain, in distress, in weariness—and the Lord burned them! Who can defend the procedure? Who can so subordinate his reason and his sense of right as to commend the justice of this tremendous punishment? So they might say who begin their Bible reading at the eleventh chapter of Numbers. There is only one place at which to begin the reading of the Bible, and that is at the first chapter of Genesis and the first verse ; and there is only one place at which the reading of the Bible can be completed, and that is the last verse of the last chapter of the last book. The difficulty of the Christian argument is that people will begin to read the Bible wherever they please. The Bible has but one beginning and one ending, and only they are qualified to pronounce judgment upon it who read the book from end to end, omitting nothing, setting everything in its right place, and causing the whole to assume its proper perspective and colour. It is easily conceivable that many a man, opening the Bible at this point and beginning his acquaintance with the sacred record at this incident, might exclaim—How

harsh the divine action! how devoid not of reason only, but of justice! Who can worship a God who sets fire to people who, living in a wilderness, venture to complain? Who says so?—the man who does not understand the case. Who complains against God?—only he who does not know the meaning of the divine movement, the scope of the divine outlook, the purpose of the divine beneficence. Was this the first time the people had complained? Was the voice of whining quite new in the camps of Israel? The Bible does not begin with the Book of Numbers. Read the Book of Exodus, notably the fourteenth and following chapters up to the time of the giving of the law, and you will find complaint following complaint; and what was the divine answer in that succession of reproaches? Was there fire? Did the Lord shake down the clouds upon the people and utterly overwhelm them with tokens of indignation? No. When the Israelites first complained of the pursuing Egyptians, and asked if there were not graves enough in Egypt that they should have been dragged out into the wilderness to be buried, what was the answer?—Stand still and see the salvation of God. When the people complained at Marah, saying,—This water is bitter, and we cannot drink it,—did the fire descend? No spark fell from the angry heavens, but the waters were sweetened, every tang of bitterness being taken out of the pool. When the people complained of their wilderness life and having nothing to eat, what was the answer? Contempt? A storm such as fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah? No such reply was given; but the Lord said,—I will rain down food upon the sandy places, and all you shall have to do will be to go out and gather it. The people complain again—and the Lord burns them! To some murmuring there is but one reply that can be appreciated. The Lord is full of tenderness and compassion,—yea, infinite in piteousness and love is he; but there is a point when his Spirit can no longer strive with us, and when he must displace the persuasions of love by the anger and the judgment of fire.

But this is not the whole case. The people were not complaining only. The word *complaint* may be so construed as to have everything taken out of it except the feeblest protest and the feeblest utterance of some personal desire. But this is not the historical meaning of the word *complaint* as it is found

here. What happened between the instances we have quoted and the instance which is immediately before us? Until that question is answered the whole case is not before the mind for opinion or criticism. What then had taken place? The most momentous of all incidents. God had said through Moses to the people of Israel,—Will you obey the law? And they stood to their feet, as it were, and answered in one unanimous reply,—We will. The spirit of obedience having been, as we have seen, thus created, the law was given in detail. You remember the criticism passed upon this circumstance. The law was not given, and then obedience demanded; obedience was promised, and then the law was given. The Ten Words are an answer to a pledge; the pledge committed the people to the Ten Words. What had they said in their pledge? They had uttered a vow which is seldom realised in all the fulness and pathos of its meaning; they had said,—We will have none other gods beside thee. So the people were wedded to their Lord at that great mountain altar; words of fealty and kinship and Godhood had been exchanged, and now these people that had oft complained and had then promised obedience, and had then sworn that they would have none other gods beside Jehovah, complained—went back to their evil ways; and the Lord, who takes out his sword last and only calls upon his fire in extremity, smote them—burned them. And this will he do to us if we trifle with our oaths, if we practise bad faith towards the altar, if we are guilty of malfeasance in the very sanctuary of God. To criticise Providence—who is fit for that high judgment? Providence is a large word; it is like the horizon, encompassing all things with a line that cannot be touched, including all things, yet without bond or token of humiliation. Who can criticise the Providence of life—that marvellous power that lights up the world in the morning, curtains it off with a veil of darkness night by night, blesses its soil with fertility, fills its channels with streams and rivers, feeds the roots of its tiniest flowers, paints the wings of its frailest insects, leads like a cloud by day and like a fire by night, that numbers the hairs of the head of every child living in the Father's house? Who has mind enough, penetration enough, judgment enough, to call God to his bar and pronounce sentence upon the Infinite? We are vexed by details; we are blinded by

the immediate dust of the road. We are not called to judgment, but to acquiescence, to acceptance, to gratitude, to hope. To criticise God is to usurp the divine throne. Let who will pass their insane judgments upon the infinite scale of life; let it be ours, where we cannot understand, to believe; where we cannot direct, to accept, and in all things to kiss the rod and bless the Hand that lifts it. This is not the surrender of reason; it is the baptism and consecration of understanding.

Were the people content with complaining? They passed from complaining to lusting, saying, "Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic: but now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes. . . . And the people went about, and gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in a mortar, and baked it in pans, and made cakes of it"—and grumbled the while because Egyptian appetite was excited within them. There is a philosophy here. You cannot stop short with complaining. Wickedness never plays a negative game. The man who first complains will next erect his appetite as a hostile force against the will of God. A marvellous thing is this, to recollect our lives through the medium of our appetites, to have old relishes return to the mouth, to have the palate stimulated by remembered sensations. The devil has many ways into the soul. The recollection of evil may prompt a desire for its repetition. Worldliness has, no doubt, its pleasant memories. Let us be just to all men. The worldly life is not without its sensations of pleasure and gratification. We do not expect men to enter the sanctuary and forget all the old days as if they had had no pleasure in them. Old tastes will revive; the tongue will be stirred to new desires; an odour in the air will remind you of the feast you have abandoned; the sight of an old companion may drive you to wish for just one more day in the old house of bondage, in the old sensual relations. We live a very delicate life. We are not far from the enemy at any one point in our history. The sight of a face may awaken within us influences which we had supposed to be dead; the resonance of an old song may bring back the memory of black nights consecrated to the service of the devil with a will. We must

not be harsh upon those who remember the pleasant side of Egyptian life. *We* may now think of the old days with some pleasure :—how free the riotous dance was ; how eager our appetite at the feast ; how we relished the ardent poison ; how we enjoyed the exchange of passionate looks and words ! And if a longing sometimes steals in upon the heart, putting back its prayer and threatening its overthrow, this may not be sin, it may be a severe temptation, a call to a tremendous struggle ; and if in that struggle the poor soul may fall for a moment, yet, if its uppermost desire be true, though it fall it shall not be utterly cast down. If any man has escaped the snare of drunkenness, or the snare of evil indulgence of any kind, and yet now and again feels as if, after all, the old days had charms and pleasures, that transient feeling is not necessarily a sin on the part of the man who experiences its pain ; it is a temptation of the evil one, and is only to be put down by nobler prayer, by a sharper, keener cry for omnipotent defence.

The public complaint affected the bravest spirit in the camp. Moses was utterly tired out. I wonder that all leaders are not occasionally driven to extremity by sheer disgust at public ingratitude. Moses said, "Kill me . . . out of hand." Moses was not a man who naturally longed for extermination ; he was a soldier ; he was born to be a leader and a commander of the people ; but continual friction, daily exasperation, eternal misunderstanding, and implied insult, wrought in him a state of mind which expressed itself not only in a desire but in a prayer that he might die. Was the leader paid ? Was the leader pampered ? Was a separate table provided for Moses in the wilderness ? Did he not throw himself into the common lot and live the life of the common people of the desert ? Yet, notwithstanding, he was the subject of daily reproach and bitterest criticism. Who knows what it is to carry a thousand lives in his heart ? Who knows the difficulties of the shepherd's life ? Who understands the daily pain of the pastor's heart ? What has he to do ? To sympathise with all kinds of experiences ; to understand all the varied qualities of human life and human desires ; to transfuse himself into conditions and relations apparently far remote from his own central gift and call of God ; to make prayer for a thousand suppliants. It is no easy task.

We should be gentler with men who have given themselves to be our pastors, and to carry us somehow in their great hearts. A bitter word is easily spoken, but it is not easily dislodged from the memory of love. Neglect is easily shown—coldness, contempt, disregard, want of appreciation; but all the time you are bringing the pastor, the shepherd, the leader, the Moses, to desire to die. There is another manslaughter than the vulgar shedding of blood; there is a heart-murder: there are crucifixions without visible crosses. People do not always come to the assault with the avowed purpose of killing or injuring; but for want of consideration and the simplest instincts of justice, they tear men to pieces; they say, in ghostly throngs around the good man's bed,—You shall not sleep to-night; we will tear the sleep from your eyelids and vex you with a thousand tormenting memories. Let us cease from the number of those who criticise the ways of Providence and kill the messengers of Heaven.

God found assistance for Moses,—the only answer Moses could understand at the time. God's answers are accommodated to the state of our intelligence and our moral feeling. To have seventy men moved by a spirit kindred to your own is an answer which can easily be understood. Divine and spiritual replies had been given to Moses again and again; but God says,—The poor soul wants something more visible and substantial this time; I never saw him so borne down,—a man's heart so stout of will, so faultless in its sacred obstinacy; but his bold face looked blanched to-day, his commanding voice hesitated and struggled in utterance to-day; I must give him a new reply. So seventy men were called out who were filled with a kindred spirit, and the Lord said, in effect, to Moses,—I have multiplied thee by seventy: now play the man. Wondrous are the answers of God! They who have studied them most are the most assured in their Christian faith; such men do not need wordy arguments to convince them as to the utility of prayer: they found the answer to the argument on the prayer itself.

What did Moses do? He took heart again. When he heard of the fire at the outside of the camp—burning, singeing, scorching—he said,—Lord, put the fire out! He prayed for the very people that had very nearly killed him. Herein, he anticipated Christ. John said—"Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to

come down from heaven, and consume them?" The Lord said: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." Two irregular men in the camp began to prophesy; and the message was taken to Moses that another kind of fire had broken out—a species of spiritual and official insanity. Moses said,—Let them alone; good water comes from good fountains, wise words flow from wise minds; do not feel envious on my account; "would God that all the Lord's people were prophets!" That is the philosophy of progress—not dragging down the one prophet to the level of those who might prophesy, but lifting up the common camp until it is moved by divine inspirations. The great preacher has no fear of other preachers arising; the greatest preacher would say,—Put all the churches in a row, and let him who knows most of God prove his knowledge. Have no fear of inspired men, no fear of the multiplication of their number, and do not be jealous of their success; when they succeed, we succeed. The Church is one, and every minister should claim brotherhood with every other minister; to insult one of the brethren ought to be felt to be an insult to the entire fraternity. Joshua thought that Moses would feel rather angry that other people were beginning to usurp his function. Would to Heaven there were fewer Joshuas of this kind and for this purpose! for such tale-bearers work no end of mischief in every circle into which they enter, and none the less mischief that they say—Our motive was pure, our intention was good; we heard these irregular persons exercising an irregular ministry, and we were concerned for the traditional unity of the Church. Have no such concern. The one man the Lord does not need is the tale-bearer. If he must speak, let him go out into a wide and solitary place, in the deepest darkness of the night, and speak his insanity to the unheeding winds. "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets!" If they were all preachers, they would sympathise more with preachers than they do; if they were all commanders of armies, they would long for some army to command; if they had greater trials, they would have tenderer patience.

How did the Lord treat Moses? He asked him one question, "And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short?" We always forget the divine element. Moses says,—

"Who am I?" And the Lord says, in effect,—*"Yes; who indeed?"* It is not a question for you; the battle is not yours, but God's. *"Is the Lord's hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not."* The people got their way. The Lord said,—*"You shall have flesh enough to eat; I will find it: I will send out the winds to bring it, I will command the clouds to shed it; you shall have flesh enough. And whilst they ate the flesh—ate it to satiety—the judgment of the Lord fell upon them,—"*And the Lord smote the people with a very great plague," and in that wilderness a great cemetery was dug. The Lord could not be harsher to us sometimes than to answer our prayers. Pray for fine weather, pray for the rain of manna, pray that flesh may be given in the wilderness and fowls in places out of the way; but having so prayed, say, *"Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done,"* and to that prayer God always sends an angel in reply.

NOTE.

The Israelites murmuring over their heavenly food looked back with regret to the melons and cucumbers, which they had eaten so freely even in Egypt, the land of their captivity. So plentiful are these fruits and vegetables in this and other hot and sandy countries, that they grow luxuriantly either with or without cultivation, climbing up the trees and shrubs, shading the roofs of the native dwellings with their broad green leaves, or covering the ground, which would otherwise be a desert, making it as a garden in fertility and beauty. The weary traveller pauses on his way when he sees from afar the vine-shaped leaves of the water-melon in the Indian cornfields, and he turns aside to seek with eagerness for the delicious fruit, which he is sure of finding cold and refreshing in the hottest season. The cucumber is also most grateful to the taste; cooling to the over-heated frame, and an incentive to more substantial and supporting food than would otherwise be desired in these tropical countries. The God of love seems so lovingly to have provided for the inhabitants of these and all climates the food most suitable for nourishing and refreshment. Now the Israelites had heavenly food, and they needed none other, but (it is the story of a human heart) they must look back to the cucumbers and melons of Egypt.—C. W.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou hast set every one in his place. There is one God. We desire to accept thy will as complete and final. May every man know the calling wherewith he is called of God, and standing therein with all gratitude and patience, may he do his day's work as unto the Lord and not unto men. We accept the appointments of Heaven, saying,—Even so, Father : for so it seemeth good in thy sight. Thou art the Husbandman, and thy will in the vineyard who may question ? The garden is thine, and the field, and all the growths of the earth spring out of thy goodness, and are blessed with thy smile. All souls are thine. Every living thing derives its pulse from God's eternity. We will then say,—This is the Lord's world, and God is the Sovereign of the earth, and the Most High controls all life and time. The Lord's will be done. God's blessing be our only heaven. Then we shall be always contented, and our soul shall live the life of peace, because of harmony with purposes divine. Thou dost fix the measure of our days ; thou drawest the line and sayest,—This is the end. There we lie down at thy bidding seeing only thy purpose, hearing only thy voice, and being filled with thy Spirit ; we know no shame or fear. Thou dost send us upon our errands, and thou dost fix the time of their completion. It is not in man to add one inch unto his stature, to make one hair black or white. Thou hast given us liberty, but thou hast enclosed that liberty within boundaries of thine own measurement. We are still thine—bound to thy throne, working out thy will in this way or in that, and certainly bringing to pass the purposes of eternity. Show us that all the house is ordered from heaven. Deliver us from the vain idea that we can extend our boundaries and inheritances in our own name and strength. May we know that God lives and rules and directs all things, and that he means to judge the earth in righteousness by that Man whom he has ordained, even by Jesus Christ, a Priest for ever and unchangeable. Then we shall have rest in the soul : a broad sunshine will make the whole life glad : the valleys shall be lifted up to the levels, and the mountains shall be brought down and made plain before our feet, and life shall be a harmonious movement towards the blessedness of immortality. We desire thus to reap the harvest of great faith ; we would no longer be merely in the seed-time, but, thy will consenting, we would thrust our sickle into the golden harvest and make our souls fat and prosperous on the bounty of Heaven. We would live the life of strong men ; we would be confident in faith, assured in sanctified hope, resolute in holy consecration of heart ; and thus our life, though long will be short, though short will be long ; we shall not know where the common time ends and the Sabbath hour begins, where the human ceases and the divine interposes. We would be in God, in

Christ; we would be ruled by the Holy Ghost; we would live the upper life; we would see God in our disappointments and acknowledge the grace of Heaven in our humiliation, and would be brought to know that there are no inferior places in the Church, that to be a servant of Christ is to be as an angel of God, and to be a doorkeeper in the sanctuary is to be engaged in the highest of human service. Work in us these holy feelings; comfort us with all needful promise; stimulate us by such inspiration as our necessity or exhaustion may require; and, at the end—not knowing it as the end, but hailing it as the beginning—may we know that Christ hath made us more than conquerors. Amen.

Numbers xii.

CLAIMING EQUALITY.

THE question which Miriam and Aaron put to one another is quite a proper one. They said,—“Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?” The inquiry, standing within its own four corners, is one which might be legitimately and reverently propounded. But what question stands thus? Perhaps hardly any that can be put by human curiosity. The interrogation must be determined by the atmosphere surrounding it. The question would take its whole quality at the particular time from the tone of voice in which it was put. Everything depends upon tone. Herein is the weakness of all writing and of all representation of thought by visible symbols. We cannot put into letters our own spirit and purpose; the tone determines the quality, and the tone can never be reported. We are, therefore, driven, if we would form sound judgments upon events, to look at issues and results; and having looked at these, we are by so much qualified to return to the question and judge it as to its real intent. Many persons inquire, with a simplicity too simple to be genuine, whether there was any harm in the question which was put. In the written inquiry, certainly not; but in the spoken interrogation the tone was full of virulence and evil suggestion and unholy design. It will not do to write the question with pen and ink and to submit it to a stranger for judgment. The stranger knows nothing about it, and when it is submitted to him for judgment it is submitted with so finely-simulated an innocence that the man is already prepared to accord a generous judgment to the terms. God is judge. We read that “the Lord heard

it." To hear it was everything. It was not reported to the Lord. We cannot report anything to him in the sense of extending his information. The terribleness of his being judge and the graciousness of his being judge, is to be found in the fact that he *heard* it—balanced the tones, adjusted the emphasis, marked the vocal colouring, and interpreted the words by the speaker's tone and temper and attitude. The final judgment is with him who "heard" the cause during its process and during its consummation.

If the Lord did speak by Miriam and Aaron, what then? The Lord himself acknowledges that he speaks in different ways to different men. To some—perhaps to most—he comes in vision and in dream; things are heard as if they were spoken beyond the great mountain; they are echoes, hollow soundings, wanting in shape and directness, yet capable of interpretations that touch the very centres and springs of life, that make men wonder, that draw men up from flippancy and frivolity and littleness, and write upon vacant faces tokens of reverence and proofs that the inner vision is at the moment entranced by some unnameable and immeasurable revelation. To other men God speaks "apparently"—that is, in broad and visible figure. He is quite near; it is as if friend were accosting friend, and if mouth were speaking to mouth, as if two interlocutors were mutually visible and speaking within hand-range of one another. There is nothing superstitious about this; it is the fact of to-day. This is written in the book that was published last week, and will be written in the book that is to be issued to-morrow. This is not a ghost story; this is not some little cloud brought from Oriental skies, never seen elsewhere, and never beheld since it was first looked upon thousands of years ago; this is solemn history, contemporaneous history—history of which we ourselves form vital constituents. Take a book of science—what do you find in that rational and philosophical bible? You find certain names put uppermost. The writer says it is given to but few men to be a Darwin or a Helmholtz—they seem to sweep the whole horizon of knowledge. The Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone has said that it seemed to him as if Aristotle comprehended the entire register of the human mind. Why should not every boy that has caught his first fly, or cut in two his first worm,

say,—Hath not the Lord spoken unto me as well as unto Darwin, or Cuvier, or Buffon?—who are they? But it does so happen that outside the Bible we have the Moses of science—the chief man of letters, the prince of song. Take the history of music, and we find names set by themselves like insulated stars—great planetary names. What would be thought of a person who has just learned the notes of music, saying,—Hath not the Lord spoken unto me as well as unto Beethoven? He has; but he has not told you so much. There is a difference in kind; there is a difference in quality. We are all the Lord's children, but he hath spoken unto us in different ways and tones and measures; and to found upon this difference some charge or reproach, or to hurl against the chiefs of the world some envious questioning, is to go far to throw suspicion upon the assumption that the Lord has spoken to us at all. We must learn that all these differences are as certainly parts of the divine order as are the settings and movements of the stars. "One star differeth from another star in glory," yet no asteroid has ever been known to blame the planets because of their infinite largeness and their infinite lustre. Men must accept divine appointment. Every man must stand in the call wherewith he is called, and encourage a religious pride and sacred satisfaction with the position which he has been called to occupy. Light is thrown upon these ancient stories by reading them in the atmosphere of modern events. We have this twelfth chapter of Numbers, as to its broadest significance, enacted amongst us every day we live. There are great men in all lines and vocations, and there are men who might be great in modesty, if they would accept their position, and might turn their very modesty into genius, if they would acknowledge that their allotment is a determination of the hand of God.

"And . . . Miriam became leprous, white as snow." That is the fate of the sneerer in all times and in all lands. The sneerer is not a healthy man; though he be sleek in flesh and quite bright with a foxy brightness of eye, there is no real health in the man: for health is a question of the soul; it is the soul that lives. The sneerer is always shut out. For a moment his sneer provokes a little titter, but the sneer has marked the man, and he will not be invited again. Society cannot do with so much bitterness. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration

of the Almighty giveth him understanding; and the result is that the bitter cynic, who always tries to tear the clothes of the great man, knowing he cannot tear his character, is shut out of the camp, for no man wants him. What is wanted? Gentleness, tenderness, sympathy, appreciation, encouragement,—these will always be welcome; these shall have the chief seat at the table; these shall return to the feast whenever they show any inclination to come; the father and the mother and the children down to the least, and the servants of the household—yea, all, bid them loving welcome. But the critic is not wanted—the sneerer is in the way; he closes the lips of eloquence, he turns away from him the purest cheek of child life; he is a blight like an east wind; and he never is permitted to repeat his visits in any family that respects its order, or cares for its most religious and heavenly progress. A heavy penalty was leprosy for sneering. It is impossible for any penalty to be too great for sneering. Sneering is of the devil; sneering is a trick of the Evil One. No man can sneer and pray; no man can sneer and bless: the benediction will not sit on lips that have been ploughed up by the iron of sneering. Blessed be God for such judgments. God thus keeps society tolerably pure. There are men standing outside to-day whom nobody wants to see, whom no child would run to meet, for whom no flower of the spring is plucked,—simply because they are always challenging the supremacy of Moses, and thus obtruding their own insignificance, and bringing into derision faculties that might otherwise have attracted to themselves some trifling measure of respect.

We find this same law operating in all directions. There are books that say,—Are not we inspired as well as the Bible? The answer is,—Certainly you are. The Lord had spoken to Miriam and to Aaron as certainly as he had spoken to Moses,—but with a difference; and it is never for Moses to argue with Miriam. Moses takes no part in this petty controversy. He would have disproved his superior inspiration if he had stooped to this fray of words. So some books seem to say,—Are not we also inspired? The frank and true answer is—Yes. Is not many a sentence in the greatest of dramatists an inspired sentence? The frank, Christian, just answer is—Yes. Is not many a discovery in the natural world quite an instance of

inspiration? Why hesitate to say—Yes; but always with a difference? The Bible takes no part in the controversy about its own inspiration. The Bible nowhere claims to be inspired. The Bible lives—comes into the house when it is wanted, goes upstairs to the sick-chamber, follows the lonely sufferer into solitude, and communes with him about the mystery of disappointment, discipline, pain of heart; goes to the grave-side, and speaks about the old soldier just laid to rest, the little child just exhaled like a dewdrop by the morning sun. The Bible works thus—not argumentatively, not seeking an opportunity of speaking in some controversy that rages around the question of its inspiration. It lives because no hand can slay it; it stands back, or comes forward, according to the necessity of the case, because of a dignity that can wait, because of an energy that is ready to advance.

Some books claim to be *as* inspired as the Bible. Then they become leprous, and all history has shown that they are put out of the camp. Many books have arisen to put down the Bible; they have had their day: they have ceased to be. We must judge by facts and realities. The glory of the great Book is that it will bear to be translated into every language, and that all the changes of grammar are but changes of a mould, which do not affect the elasticity of water: the water of life flows into every mould and fills up all the channels, varying the courses and figure of the channels as you may. The Book is not an iron book, whose obstinacy cannot be accommodated to human requirements or progress: this is the water of life—a figure that indicates all qualities that lay hold of progress, development, change. The Bible is a thousand books—yea, a thousand thousand books, to a number no man can number, making every heart a confidential friend, whispering to every eager and attentive life some tender message meant for its own ear alone. When a man who has no claim to the dignity asserts that he is upon an equality with the great musician, the great musician takes no part in the fray; when the competitor has played his little trick, one touch of the fingers regulated by the hand divine will settle the controversy. By this token we stand or fall with our Christianity, with our great Gospel. If any man has a larger truth to speak, let him speak it; if any man can touch the

wounded human heart with a finer delicacy, a more healing sympathy, let him perform his miracle. To be spoken against is no sign of demerit. We are too fearful about this matter. Put your finger upon any name in human history that indicates energy of a supreme kind, influence of the most beneficent quality, that has not been spoken against. The mischief is, as ever, that timid people imagine the charge to bring with it its own proof. The Church is wrecked by timidity. The fearful man is doing more injury to-day than can be done by any number of assailants. The man who treats his Christianity as a private possession, and who is afraid lest any man should challenge him to combat, is a man who is a dead weight upon the Church, and if we could get rid of that man it would be the happiest event in our Church history.

How did Moses prove his superiority? By prayer. In effect, he said,—Lord, let her alone; be gentle to her, poor fool; she is moved by unworthy impulses—a little feminine jealousy because of a marriage she cannot understand; pity her; wipe off the white blotch, and allow her to come out again; perhaps she will never do it any more:—"Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee." There he proves that his inspiration was of a quality most noble. We are strongest when we are weakest; we are sublimest when we whisper our prayer under the load that would have oppressed and destroyed us. Judge your inspiration by your devoutness. Never be content with any inspiration that can merely ask questions, create suspicions, perform the unworthy performance of sneering; but know that you are a great soul and a valiant and most royal man and crowned prince, when you take the large, bright view, which you are bound to do by noble charity.

All this would be of social consequence, and by no means to be undervalued in the education of the world; but it acquires its most appalling solemnity in view of the fact that questioning and sneering of this kind about prophets, preachers, books, churches, means to go forward and to challenge the supremacy of Christ. Sneering cannot stop short at Moses. We cannot draw a line, saying,—Having overthrown the servant, we shall be content. There is an impulse in these things, hurrying and driving men on to issues which perhaps at first they never contemplated. Beware of beginnings, and resist them. To curtail our best

reading is to begin a process that will end in mental darkness. To give up the Church once a day means, being interpreted, that the time will come when the heart will relinquish the Church altogether. A sad and terrible thing it is when men suppose that they can do with less Bible, less Church, less public testimony. They plead weariness, distance, difficulties of a family kind; they are fertile in excuses when the heart is reluctant to go. Let us face broad meanings, final issues. The meaning is that men who challenge Moses will endeavour to dispossess Christ, saying,—“We will not have this man to reign over us.” Was not Socrates as pure a man? Have we not found some morality in old Indian books quite as pure as the morality of the New Testament? Did not Marcus Aurelius approach very nearly to the sublimity of Christian ethics? Have there not been many men in all history who have been entitled to sit with Christ in the temple of purity and wisdom? These are not the questions. Christianity does not bring into disrepute any beautiful sentence found anywhere in heaven or in earth. Christ never said,—This is a beautiful thing spoken by a fervid fancy, but you must take no heed of it. He said,—“I am the light of the world,” wherever there is a sparkle of brilliance, it is a jet of my own glory; wherever there is a wise word, it is God’s word; wherever a beautiful song is sung, it is a snatch of heaven’s music. Whoever speaks a holy, pure, comforting word must be permitted to go on with his ministry. If you call down fire from heaven against such an one, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

Numbers xiii., xiv. 1-25.

IRRELIGIOUS FEARS.

GOD gives no speculative commands. When he said—"Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel," he meant that the land of Canaan was to be given to Israel whatever difficulties or delays might occur in the process of acquisition. There is no *if* in the commandments of Heaven that may mean either of two courses or either of two ways. God says,—You shall have this, if you are faithful. But the *if* relates to the human mind and to the human disposition, and not to the solidity and certainty of the divine purpose or decree. This is true in morals. Along the line that is laid down in the Bible, which is called, happily and properly, the line of salvation, heaven is found—not the mean heaven of selfish indulgence and selfish complacency and release from mere toil and pain, but the great heaven of harmony with God, identification with the Spirit divine, complete restfulness in the movement of the infinite purpose. There will be difficulties on the road; these difficulties will assume various proportions, according to the dispositions of the men who survey them; but the Lord does not propose to give the end without, by implication, proposing also to find the grace and comfort necessary for all the process. We are not at liberty to stop at processes as if they were final points; we have nothing to do with processes but to go through them; the very call to attempt them is a pledge that they may be overcome. But these processes test the quality of men. It is by such processes that we are revealed to ourselves. If everything came easily as a mere matter of course, flowing in sequence that is never disturbed, we should lose some of the highest advantages of this present time school. We are made strong by exercise; we are made wise by failure; we are chastened by disappointment; driven back again and again six

days out of the seven, we are taught to value the seventh day the more, that it gives us rest, and breathing time, and opportunity to consider the situation, so that we may begin another week's battle with a whole Sabbath day's power. To some the processes of life are indeed hard; let us never underrate them. Men are not cheered when the difficulties of the way are simply undervalued. No man can sympathise with another until he has learned the exact weight of the other man's trouble and the precise pain of his distress. There is a rough and pointless comfort which proceeds upon the principle that you have only to underrate a man's trials—to make them look as little and contemptible as possible—in order to invigorate his motive and to increase his strength. That is a profound mistake. He can sympathise best who acknowledges that the burden is heavy and the back weak, and the road is long, and the sky dull, and the wind full of ominous moaning;—granted that the sympathising voice can say all this in a tone of real appreciation, it has prepared the listener for words of cheer and inspiration—healthy, sound, intelligent courage. This is just the way of the Bible; it recognises the human lot in all its length and breadth; it addresses itself to circumstances which it describes with adequate minuteness and with copious and pathetic eloquence.

Here you find a number of men, such as live in all ages, who are crushed by material considerations. They report that the people of the country which they were sent to search were "strong," their cities were "walled and very great," and the population was made up of the Anakim—the "giants," the towering and mighty sons of Anak; they reported that some dwelt in "the south," and some "in the mountains," and some "by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan." This was a mean report, it was hardly a report at all,—so nearly may a man come to speak the truth, and yet not to be truthful, so wide is the difference between fact and truth. Many a book is true that is written under the name of fiction; many a book is untrue that lays claim only to the dry arguments of statistics and schedules. Truth is subtle; it is a thing of atmosphere, perspective, unnameable environment, spiritual influence. Not a word of what the truth says may have occurred in what is known as

literal fact, because it is too large a thing ever to be encompassed within the boundaries of any individual experience. The fact relates to an individuality; the truth relates to a race. A fact is an incident which occurred; a truth is a gospel which is occurring throughout all the ages of time. The men, therefore, who reported about walled cities, and tall inhabitants, and mountain refuges, and fortresses by the sea, confined themselves to simply material considerations; they overlooked the fact that the fortress might be stronger than the soldier, that the people had nothing but figure, and weight, and bulk, and were destitute of the true spirit which alone is a guarantee of sovereignty of character and conquest of arms. But this is occurring every day. Again and again we come upon terms which might have been written this very year. We are all men of the same class, with an exceptional instance here and there; we look at walls, we receive despatches about the stature of the people and the number of their fortresses, and draw very frightsome and terrible conclusions concerning material resources, forgetting in our eloquent despatches the only thing worth telling, namely: that if we were sent by Providence and are inspired by the Living God and have a true cause and are intent to fight with nobler weapons than gun and sword, the mountains themselves shall melt whilst we look upon them, and they who inhabit the fortresses shall sleep to rise no more. This is what we must do in life—in all life—educational, commercial, religious. We have nothing to do with outsides and appearances, and with resources that can be totalled in so many arithmetical figures; we have to ascertain, first, Did God send us? and secondly, if he sent us, to feel that no man can drive us back. If God did not send us, we shall go down before the savage; if God is not in the battle, it cannot and ought not to succeed, and failure is to be God's answer to our mean and unrighteous and untimely prayer. Who is distressed by appearances? Who is afraid because the labour is very heavy? What young heart quails because the books which lie upon the road which terminates in the temple of wisdom are many in number and severe in composition? We are called to enter the sanctuary of wisdom and of righteousness; therefore we must take up the books as a very little thing and master them, and lay them down, and smile at the difficulties which once made us afraid.

But one man at least spoke up and said,—We must go; this thing is to be done :—"Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." Was Caleb, then, a giant—larger than any of the sons of Anak? Was he a Hercules and a Samson in one? Was his arm so terrific that every stroke of it was a conquest? We are not told so; the one thing we are told about Caleb is that he was a man of "another spirit." That determines the quality of the man. Character is a question of spirit. It is an affair of inward and spiritual glow. Caleb had been upon the preliminary search; Caleb had seen the walls, and the Anakim, and the fortresses, and he came back saying,—We can do this, not because we have so many arms only or so many resources of a material kind—but because he was a man of "another spirit." In the long run, spirit wins; in the outcome of all history, spirit will be uppermost. The great battles of life are not controversies of body against body, but, as far as God is in them, they are a question of spirit against body, thought against iron, prayer against storming and blustering of boastful men. While the cloud hangs over the field, and the dust of the strife is very thick, and the tumult roars until it deafens those who listen, we cannot see the exact proportions, colours, and bearings of things; but if we read history instead of studying the events of the day which have not yet settled themselves into order and final meaning, we shall discover that spirit is mightier than body, that "knowledge is power," that "righteousness exalteth a nation," and that they who bear the white banner of a pure cause ultimately triumph because God is with them.

How little the people had grown! They hear of the walled cities, and the great towns, and the tall men—the Amalekites, and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and they lifted up their voices and wept—and wept all night! You have only to make noise enough in the ears of some men to make them afraid; you have simply to keep on repeating a catalogue of names, and they think you are reciting the resources of almightiness; mention one opposition, and possibly they may overcome the suggestion of danger: but have your mouth well-filled with hostile names and be able to roll off the catalogue without halt or stammer, and you pour upon

the fainting heart a cataract which cannot be resisted. The people had grown but little: they were still in the school of fear; they were still in the desert of despair; they were childish, cowardly, spiritless; they had no heart for prayer; they forgot the only thing worth remembering, the pledge and covenant of God. Let us not condemn them. It is easy to condemn ancient Israelites and forgotten unbelievers. How stands the case with us? Precisely as it stood with the people of whom we are now reading. We are not an inch ahead of them. Christians are to-day just as fearful as the children of Israel were thousands of years ago: they have only to hear of certain bulks, forces, sizes, numbers, in order to quail as if they had never heard of the Eternal God. Would to Heaven we could make an exchange as between such people and some so-called infidels we know! The infidels would make better Christians. There is more reality in them, more firmness, more standing right up to the line of conviction. He who prays, and then fears, brings discredit upon the altar at which he prayed; he who talks of the promises of God, and then lives in subjection to the devil, is worse than an infidel.

What wonder that God himself was filled with contempt towards the people whom he had thus far led? He would slay them; he would "smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them"; he would root up the root of Abraham and begin a new people in the spirit and life of Moses; he would start from a new centre; he would obliterate the past: he would begin afresh to-morrow.

"And Moses said unto the Lord, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou Lord art among this people, that thou Lord art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness" (xiv. 13-16).

What book but the Bible has the courage to represent a man standing in this attitude before his God and addressing his Sovereign in such persuasive terms? This incident brings before

us the vast subject of the collateral considerations which are always operating in human life. Things are not straight and simple, lying in rows of direct lines to be numbered off, checked off and done with. Lines bisect and intersect and thicken into great knots and tangle, and who can unravel or disentangle the great heap? Things bear relations which can only be detected by the imagination, which cannot be compassed by arithmetical numbers, but which force upon men a new science of calculation, and create a species of moral algebra, by which, through the medium and help of symbols, that is done which was impossible to common arithmetic. Moses was a great leader; he thought of Egypt: what will the enemy say? The enemy will put a false construction upon this. As if he had said,—This will be turned against Heaven; the Egyptians do not care what becomes of the people, if they can laugh at the Providence which they superstitiously trusted; the verdict passed by the heathen will be:—God was not able to do what he promised, so he had recourse to the vulgar artifice of murder. The Lord in this way developed Moses. In reality, Moses was not anticipating the divine purpose, but God was training the man by saying what he, the Lord, would do, and by the very exaggeration of his strength called up Moses to his noblest consciousness. We do this amongst ourselves. By using a species of language adapted to touch the innermost nerve and feeling of our hearers, we call those hearers to their best selves. If the Lord had spoken a hesitant language, or had fallen into what we may call a tone of despair, Moses himself might have been seduced into a kindred dejection; but the Lord said, I will smite, I will disinherit, I will make an end; and Moses became priest, intercessor, mighty pleader,—the very purpose which God had in view—to keep the head right, the leading man in tune with his purposes. So Moses said, "Pardon"; the Lord said, "Smite"; and Moses said, "Pardon"—that is the true smiting. The Lord meant it; the Lord taught Moses that prayer which Moses seemed to invent himself. The Lord trains us, sometimes, by shocking our sensibilities; and by the very denunciation of his judgments he drives us to tenderer prayer.

How stands our own case in relation to this? We deserve divine contempt: we are frail and spiritless and mean; we shun

danger; we are afraid of the damp night; we want to be let alone; if it is possible to die without fighting, let us die in the wilderness; if we can escape danger, we prefer to turn over upon our couch and to slumber away into death and oblivion. Where is the aggressive spirit amongst Christians? Men have gone out to search the land, and they have brought back this report: that the land is a land of darkness: the land is a land of shame: there are thousands upon thousands of people dying of starvation, perishing for lack of knowledge, contemning the sanctuary, shut up in avenues and alleys and back places into which the daintiest civilisation dare not go: rough men given to drunkenness, bestiality and cruelty: women who are concealing their beauty under distress and poverty and manifold shame: children who have never heard the divine name or been invited to the divine table. Christians are few in number; the devil's army is an infinite host, dwelling in great cities walled and very strong, and the devil's men are of heroic proportion; their language is strong and definite; their habits have in them no touch of fear; they are valiant in their master's cause: they care not whether they swear, whether they drink, whether they do the foul and forbidden deed of unrighteousness and untruthfulness. The Church says,—Let us sing an evening hymn and go home by the quiet way, and sigh ourselves into any heaven that may be ready to take us; do not be sensational; do not attempt anything novel or unusual; let us be quit of all things; and if we can get home by sneaking along the eaves of the houses and in the shady part of the road so that nobody may see us, do let us sing the evening hymn and go to rest. Is there no Caleb? Is there no Joshua? Is there no man of "another spirit" to say, Let us go up at once, when we are well able to overcome it? In whose strength? In God's. By whose armour? God's. The battle is not yours, but God's. The one thing we have dropped out of our calculations is—Almightiness.

Numbers xiv. 26-45.

26. And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,

27. How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me.

28. Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you:

29. Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me,

30. Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

31. But your little ones which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.

32. But as for you, your carcases, they shall fall in this wilderness.

33. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness.

34. After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.

35. I the Lord have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.

36. And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land,

37. Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the Lord.

38. But Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of the men that went to search the land, lived still.

39. And Moses told these sayings unto all the children of Israel; and the people mourned greatly.

40. And they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the Lord hath promised: for we have sinned.

41. And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the Lord? but it shall not prosper.

42. Go not up, for the Lord is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies.

43. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword : because ye are turned away from the Lord, therefore the Lord will not be with you.

44. But they presumed to go up unto the hill top : nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and Moses, departed not out of the camp.

45. Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah.

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY.

IS this ancient history ? Is there no inquiry of this kind propounded in heaven to-day ? Has the generation ceased to be evil ? and is God no longer made angry by repeated and aggravated disobedience ? Because the thing was once written, we must not conclude that it was only once done. There are some things we cannot keep on writing, and we cannot continue to speak ; we write them once, and the words must stand for ever as our one testimony ; other things we say once for all : we could not bear to re-utter the complaint, so bitter, so trying, so destructive to the utterer : we pass from words to signs ; sometimes we do not even make the sign, unless it be found in some broken sob or sigh, full of unutterable meaning. We shall put ourselves in a right relation to this inquiry, if we make answer that the generation is still evil, the Lord is still forbearing, the attitude of Heaven is a posture expressive of wonder and sorrow, and the answer of the earth to that posture is a repetition of rebelliousness and disobedience. A tender word is this word *bear*—"How long shall I bear with this evil congregation ?" And yet the word *bear* is put in by the English writer ; it seemed to him to express the divine meaning most fully. But another word might have been inserted here, and is inserted by the best commentators upon the sacred text. "How long shall I *forgive* this congregation ?" Forgiveness itself becomes a kind of weariness ; the repetition of pardon becomes a bitter irony and most vexatious mockery of the man who pardons ; an awful thought, verified by our own experience, needing no long and wordy argument to establish it. There does come a time in heart-history when the utterance of another pardon would seem to dispossess the man himself of judgment, responsibility, or sense of rightness ; he is driven to say,—No,

the pardons have all been lost, the noble words have been thrown into the sea, or they have died upon the idle wind, and I will say them no more. So there comes a day of withdrawal, even in human relations: a time when we say, We cannot repeat our supplication for pardon addressed to Heaven on the part of one who has seen a thousand pardons trampled under foot. Is this ancient history? It is the story of this present day; it is a line from every man's biography. Could we rid ourselves of the distance of mere time and look with eyes cleansed and strengthened from on high at this passage, we should feel that it set before us the very agony of God in relation to our own accumulated and intolerable guilt.

What is the great all-determining thought arising out of this reasoning on the part of God and this determination to judge and destroy the men who have so long defied him? That thought is, that it is impossible to resist God and live. Were it possible to live in a spirit of resistance to God, that very possibility would dethrone the God who is defied. He is not God who can be resisted, and yet the rebel enjoys all the delights of immortality and all the security of heaven. This is not fatalism. Fatalism can play no part in the distribution and action of men who are morally constituted. It is a contradiction in terms to assert that a man who is morally constituted can be fated. Wherever moral purpose asserts its presence and influence, fatalism is impossible. By the very circumstances of our nature God has rendered predestination, of the narrow and selfish kind, impossible. We cannot predestinate moral beings. By the very act of predestination, narrowly construed, we take out the moral element which we are supposed to have fatalised and predetermined. To have a moral constitution is to have rights. God made of one blood all nations of men—not in any merely physical or animal sense; but he made of one kind all men—one kin, one fellowship, one soul—one central and unchangeable relation to himself. That is the full meaning of the declaration that men are one, that humanity is one. But is there not a difference amongst men with regard to genius, force, capacity,—all kinds of accent and individuality? Certainly; but all these bear no relation whatever to the eternal destiny of the soul. There is a difference in the things of nature,—the little flower, the great tree; the tiny

insect, and the sun-darkening eagle that lives at its gate ;—but all these have a common centre : all these are, so to say, gravitated around the one centre : all these plants, trees, flowers, grasses, are rooted in the same soil, are baptised by the same cloud, are warmed by the same sun. The difference is a difference of expression and relation ; but the root is fed by the same great bounty. So differences of capacity and of influence, and differences of all kinds must be regarded within other boundaries than those which men attempt to set up as describing the fatalism of life. God makes no experiments upon his creatures. God did not create a man with the view of satisfying the divine wonder as to how that man would work out the mystery of life. The purpose of God is one. The Bible reveals the unity of that purpose. It never changes. It is one of two things in relation to the ages : salvation or destruction, complacency or judgment ; heaven or hell. We are not justified in making experiments even upon one another in any sense that involves the possibility of an awful destiny. When we inflict pain, when we occasion disappointment, when we subject our nearest and dearest ones to all kinds of suffering,—we can only justify ourselves by saying that the process will be consummated in a result that will repay all the trial of the road, and glorify it, and make its memory sweet, so that our very sufferings shall add to the richness and intensity of our joy. You have no right to subject anyone to the pain of travelling—its disappointment, its humiliation, and its sorrow,—say to all the agony of the sea—merely for the sake of watching the sufferer writhe under the torment ; but knowing that all the heaving billows and stormy winds, and all the evils incident to such travel, mean final escape, the attainment of a desired haven, the hospitality of a new world, the liberty and progress of ennobled conditions, you say,—Bear up ; cheer thee ; be brave ; to-morrow there will be land ahead, or presently you will see those whose faces you have desired, and one glimpse of them, one clasp of united hands, and the sea is forgotten, and your enjoyment of your escape is none the less because of your recollection of many a discomfort and your memory of many a pain. So God is conducting this congregation of Israel through the wilderness ; but he will have his own way. If it were an exercise of merely arbitrary judgment and wisdom, we might

feel unable to accept the story ; but the purpose of it is liberty, enjoyment, progress,—a great Canaan, a place of summer and fruitfulness and home. Where the purpose is beneficent the process must partake of its nature, and the process is justified by the beneficence of the end. Who could justify God, even within the narrow boundaries of this earth, if our present experience were to end in itself ? The days so few—a handful at the most—so troubled, so storm-darkened, so shaken by a thousand alarms ; the body so ailing, so frail, always cowering under the fear of approaching death ; disappointments thick as thorns upon the tree ; who could justify even God himself, who set us in this life, if this life were all ? Who then could refrain from the cry,—“ If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable,” because our standard is wrong, and our expectation is a deception ? Take in the whole horizon ; embrace the whole purpose of God ; then you will be enabled to say,—“ All things work together for good to them that love God.” We must not interrupt the process saying,—We will judge God here, or there ; we must wait until he says,—It is finished,—and then give our judgment.

It is impossible to obey God and die. Those who went out to spy the land and brought back a whining report filled with trouble and discontent died. The divine contempt killed them ; God’s laugh drove them away like a bitter wind. But Caleb and Joshua lived. Why did they live ? Because they wrought in harmony with the divine purpose. They brought back the gospel—not a gospel of sensuous ease and indulgence, calling upon men to fold their arms and wait in slumbrous tranquillity until heaven descended into their hearts ; but the braver gospel : Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to do this ; the Lord’s hand is mighty enough to win this battle for us. Such men cannot die. God will protect their immortality. Our cheerful singers cannot perish ; their songs belong to the ages ; their words of joy and stimulus and inspiration are at once taken in by every heart and are welcomed into every home. Analyse human history : go into origins, and roots, and central springs, and fountains, and you will find that the gospel spirit of Caleb and Joshua is the victor spirit ; the cheerful spirit, is the spirit immortal.

All fear tends to death ; it darkens the mind ; it shuts out complete views of things ; it distempers all colour ; it disqualifies a man for using his own resources. "The fear of man bringeth a snare." Wherever there is fear, there is not a sound mind or a perfect will or a united strength. This is well known in all circles. If the speaker utters his discourse under fear either of criticism or misunderstanding, by so much that fear binds the wings of his mind, puts out the eyes of his genius, shears the locks of his strength, and throws him down in humiliation and helplessness ; but when he is himself in very deed, living in the joy of the hearer, answering with gracious response the appeal of radiant faces, at home in the mystery of his subject,—then he wins : every sentence is a victory, every argument a conquest, the closing of every paragraph the waving of the white banner of entire victory and success. Fear cannot read the Bible ; fear cannot hear the Gospel ; fear cannot understand the darkness. Let us beware of the spirit of fearfulness ; nor let us distress ourselves by imagining that fearfulness arising from physical conditions is a sin before God. Your fearfulness may not be the result of unbelief but of some subtle trouble in the body. God will understand that difficulty. He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are but dust—a wind that cometh for a little time and then passeth away. He will not plead against us with the thunder of his power ; he will comfort us in the day of our weakness. But whilst this word of tender solace is spoken to some, it must not be taken as a justification of fearfulness or timidity arising from partial belief ; under such circumstances Christ's question is "Why are ye so fearful ? how is it that ye have no faith ?" We wound him by our unbelief ; we break in two his miracle by our want of perfect trust in wisdom and truth.

The men who brought the report died, and their children had to wander in the wilderness a year for every day that their fathers were away searching out the land. The children had to bear the burden. If there were no Bible, this would still be the case. This is the Bible of fact, not the Bible of speculative theology. We see this every day : that we are bearing the burdens left us as a heavy inheritance of trouble. The lines upon your face would not have been so deep but for the sin you

may not name. You would not at five-and-forty years of age have been an old man, out of whose voice all tones of joy have been taken, but for the sins of those now dead whose names you will not even mention aloud, lest the utterance of them should double the sorrow already too much. This mystery is in life. The Bible does not invent a fanatical Providence or set up some wonderful scheme built upon the baseless fabric of imagination. We have facts occurring around us : experiences of our own : a consciousness that cannot be destroyed in our own hearts ; and all these gather themselves up into a poignant and firm corroboration of what is found written in the Holy Scriptures. The children *do* suffer for their forefathers' misdeeds. The battles of one century are occasioned by the misrule of centuries long forgotten. We carry our dead about with us in many forms day by day. Are we, then, to content ourselves with this retrospective contemplation, saying,—My diseases are due to my forefather, my sorrow is a black inheritance, my weakness has a history stretching far back through my ancestors? We may indulge in that retrospect, but only for a moment. It is a selfish retrospect if pushed too far. It becomes gracious, Christian,—a noble stimulus—if coming out of it we say,—Then by so much as I have been injured by the past, I must take care in God's grace and strength to do what I can for those who are to come after me ; I will prevent their carrying a burden if I can possibly do so, in the strength and grace of God ; I will try to live so wisely, simply, purely, obediently, as not to leave any great black cloud resting over my house and name. If the retrospect lead to that noble decision, then it is of the quality of prayer, and belongs to the holy class of the most spiritual and sacred oaths. Beware of sentimentalism. Recognise the reality of history and turn it into an inspiration in view of all the untravelled and unknown future.

The people were like ourselves. Having heard from Moses what the Lord had resolved upon—for “Moses told these sayings unto all the children of Israel”—“the people mourned greatly. And they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the Lord hath promised : for we have sinned.” But Moses said,—No. Men cannot work out of time. There

is a providence of time ; there is a providence of opportunity. The people, smarting, perhaps, more in consequence of the effects of sin than in consequence of a thorough perception of the nature of sin, said,—We will now go up. But Moses said,—Do not be foolish ; if you go, the Ark of the Covenant will not depart out of the camp and go with you ; you are out of time ; you are too late ; you had the opportunity and neglected it. Men cannot create opportunities after this fashion. There are prayers that become idle cries ; there are religious services that become, because untimely, mere mockeries. There is a reading of the Bible which gets nothing out of the sacred Book ; you let the hour of light pass by, and now in these dark troubled clouds you can read nothing of truth, of grace. Redeem the time ! “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” Work while it is yet day, for the night cometh wherein no man can work. You will pray by-and-by ? There is no by-and-by. You will go up presently ? There is no presently. You mean one day to shake off the devil and be free ? There is no promise of such day,—“now is the accepted time . . now is the day of salvation.” “To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as in the provocation in the wilderness.” Be wise ! be wise in time !

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, show us that we are living under thy rule, and that thy rule is best because it is thine. God is love; God is light: in him is no darkness at all. God knoweth the end from the beginning, and every step of the long road; therefore will we take our marching orders from thyself, going as thou dost command, halting where thou dost please, and going quickly, or slowly, or standing still, as we may receive word from God. We never thought we should have said this; it is not natural to us. We love our own way; we think our wisdom quite divine; we are obstinate and self-regarding; but thou hast wrought upon us directly and indirectly, by light, by opening of the mind, by bitter portions, by stinging disappointment, by showing us that the road we thought led to liberty led nowhere. So we have come back again, humbled, much enlightened, conscious of our own folly, and modestly desiring to be taught of God. We thought we were mighty, until we lifted our arm and found it was but a straw; we said we would run all the way and know no weariness, and, behold, in one hour we were laid down in fatigue and pain and distress. Thus thou dost teach men, not always by doctrine and argument and exhortation in words which men can answer again with vain impertinence of mind, but by overthrow, confusion: night suddenly encroaching upon day, and all things set upside down in bewilderment that cannot be ordered into straight lines. So are we taught, and taught of God. We call it experience, because we are afraid to use some noble and truer term. Yet even here thou art patient with us, so that now many men who once spake of experience venture to speak of God. We would be found in the number; we would not be of those who are afraid to give the right names to things. Open thou our mouth that we may show forth boldly our testimony on thy behalf. It will do us good to speak the word that fills the mind. If we could once speak it, we could speak it again, more easily, with more familiarity and even tenderness. Help us to say,—God did thus for me; God led me in this wise; God is my Maker, my Portion, my Redeemer, my All; God is his name, and God is love. We bless thee for this use of words; we are the better for it; we feel as if we had opened a channel through which purest water had streamed from fountains in heaven; the very words purify the channel through which they flow. Thou hast led us all our days. We see it now; it is perfectly clear to minds that once could see nothing because of spiritual blindness; we see now why the message came in the night time and not in the morning, why the flower was plucked in the bud before it opened the secret of the mystery of its beauty; we see now how, though the night was crying, the tears were morning dew.

We understand things better than we did. Time has altered itself to us; it is nothing: it is a breath—a wind; sometimes a mere mockery of duration, without substance—flying, dying, whilst we speak of it. So now we take our stand upon thy word. We are sure, through Jesus Christ thy Son, that thy purpose concerning us is full of mercy; thou hast no pleasure in the death of men: thy delight is in life, in liberty, in immortality. Life and immortality are brought to light in the Gospel by thy Son, our one Saviour, almighty in power, infinite in love. We give thee thanks for all the mercies of our little life. If we have escaped the sea and are again on firm land, we say,—The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, the sea and they that dwell upon it;—and we bless thee for nightly protection, daily care, for family reunion, and the incoming of the hopes which make our life worth living. Accept the praises of those who in reunion bless the Lord in family rejoicing and sacred song. If we have been brought through perplexity, business difficulty,—if controversies have been settled,—if the dark cloud has been lifted,—if the pain at the heart has been somewhat lessened,—if the sorrow-flood has assuaged a little—we bless thee: it is God's doing, it is the Father's revelation of himself in the night of our distress, and we will rejoice and be glad, and with instruments of music will heighten the song which our own voices cannot fully express. Tell the old man that he has hardly begun to live: that the ages in the flesh are not in the soul. Take up the little child, and show it wonders in all the blue heaven, and bid it be glad whilst it may, and to know nothing of the mystery of tears. Whisper to the dying that death is the gate of immortality. Speak to the lonely; startle his solitude into mystic and solemn communion. Bring back the bad man; we cannot reach him; he is to us as hell: no water can drown the flame; no speech of ours can be heard by badness so wicked. The Lord hear us, pity us, spare us a little while; and then, the shadows thickening, lengthening, darkening, may there be beyond a glint of light, which means dawn, morning, heaven. Amen.

Numbers xiv. 43.

“ . . . because ye are turned away from the Lord, therefore the Lord will not be with you.”

RELIGIOUS EXPLANATION OF FAILURE.

EVEN that is a word of comfort. The comfort is not far to fetch, even from the desert of this stern fact. The comfort is found in the fact that the Lord will be with those who have *not* turned away from him. The law operates in two opposite ways. Law is love, when rightly seized and applied; and love is law, having all the pillars of its security and all the dignity of its righteousness to support it in all the transitions of its

experience. The reason why we fail is that God has gone from us. Putting the case so, we put it wrongly. God has not gone from us : we have gone from God. What we want is more plain speaking to ourselves. Until a man can see the word *CRIMINAL* written in capital letters upon the very centre of his heart, and can spell the word, pronouncing each letter with tremulous deliberation, and uttering the whole word with broken-heartedness, he does not begin to touch the gate which opens upon the kingdom of heaven. He must not apply the word *sinner* to himself too familiarly, because it is a common name ; it is an appellation written upon the whole belt of the world, and can therefore be used with vague generality. The term is right enough : it is a necessary term ; but it must be so personalised and accentuated and driven home that there can be no mistake about the individuality of its application. When we *see* the sin, we will cry for the Saviour. The Church is nothing without its godliness ; it is less than nothing : it is not only the negation of strength, it is the utter and most helpless weakness. Israel was the Church in the wilderness, and Israel was nothing without its God. The number might be six hundred thousand fighting men, and they would go down like a dry wooden fence before a raging fire, if the Lord was not in the midst. They were not men without him. The Church lives, moves, and has its being in God—not in some high or deep metaphysical sense only, but in the plain and obvious sense of the terms : that it has no being or existence outside God. When it forgets to pray, it loses the art of war ; when the Church forgets to put on the beautiful garments of holiness, though it be made up of a thousand Samsons, it cannot strike one fatal blow at the enemy. Let us understand this with some clearness. The Church is assembled, say, a thousand strong ; but if every man in that thousand has turned from the Living God, what does the thousand account for in battle ? For nothing ! Ceasing to be godly, they cease to be men, in any sense significant of devotion, energy and successful application of resources. They were only made men by their goodness ; it was only while they prayed that they stood upright ; whilst the hymn was singing in their hearts and outpouring itself from their grateful lips, they were men who could fight and win, every stroke being a victory ; but when they left off their

religion, or their religious loyalty, they did not become as other men ; it is impossible to fall back into the common quantity of human nature after having been in heaven : the fall is deeper than that. When Lucifer fell, he fell into a bottomless pit : wherever he is, he is falling *now*. So the Christian professor, having turned aside from God, does not become an ordinary man and take his old place in society, and be just as he used to be in the old times when he never prayed or confessed the holy Name. We do not fall back upon our old selves : we fall into perdition. The Church is not a club, nor is it so much physical force, nor is it, in any technical sense, a mere army of men drawn up in battle array, equal to the fight, whatever their principles may be. Again and again let it be said, till the densest heart responds to the tremendous appeal, the Church has no existence apart from its godliness. It is constituted upon divine foundations ; it is animated by divine impulses ; it is inspired by divine motives ; it is protected by divine security. A Church that has lost its faith has lost *itself*. You cannot have an unbelieving Church, a faithless Church : when the faith has gone, the Church has gone. Were there not, then, a thousand men of Israel against a thousand men of Amalek ? No ; the thousand men of Israel had no existence but for God. They represented an idea, a kingdom, a divine purpose, a theocracy,—a wholly new thought in the universe ; and apart from that, they became minus quantities. A thousand men of Israel were a thousand men *plus* God. Men cannot lose their godliness and keep their character. A man who has once really prayed can never go back to the common speech of men and be as if he had never prayed when he goes back ; the common speech becomes profanity in lips which have sworn their own oath. You cannot take the statistics of the Church. You cannot be numbering men and saying,—The Church is thus and so, as to quantity, force, and influence. The Church lives upon bread the world knoweth not of. Count the Church by the volume of its prayer ; register the strength of the Church by the purity and completeness of its consecration. If you number the Church in millions, and tell not what it is at the altar and at the cross, you have returned the census of a cemetery, not the statistics of a living, mighty, invincible host. Genius is nothing, learning is nothing,

organisation is a sarcasm and an irony,—apart from that which gives everyone of them value and force—the praying heart, the trustful spirit. The Church conquers by holiness. There is an answer to grammar ; there is no reply to self-sacrifice. Men may smite theology of a formal and scientific kind, or may render its existence a perpetual risk ; but there is no answer to the love which hopeth all things, endureth all things,—love which is mightiest when the clouds are darkest, and most redeeming when the sin is most complete.

We shall conquer the Amalek world when we have conquered our own hearts. God does not fight for nominal believers. Israel represented nominal religion. The Amalekite and the Canaanite would be represented as peoples of heathenish relations and conditions, and Israel would be represented as the people of God. But the Lord will not fight the battles of nominal believers. By the very righteousness which makes him God he prefers an honest idolater to a dishonest nominalist. That is a thought which should make us consider our position. An idolater may be honest ; but a professing Christian, if not faithful to his profession, is not merely unfaithful : there is no term that can describe the turpitude of his wickedness. The Lord will make Amalek conqueror and send down the Canaanite to burn the dry stubble of prayerless Israel :—"the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah"—men that might have been beaten back by a hand that was true to Heaven. It is right that the heathen should conquer when the Church is unfaithful. It is solemnly right that the heathen should mock the land that sends out missionaries one day and doers of all evil the next, if not in the same ship. What wonder if the heathen laugh at the missionary when they see immediately behind him the man who is to undo all that the Christian evangelist attempts to accomplish ? It may be rough logic—it may be reason in which many a flaw can be found by penetrating minds ; but it is not to be wondered at, considering the nature of heathenism and the intuitions of common sense. You have no right to ask God to go with you merely as a convenience. Amalek is in sight, the Canaanite is on the alert, the walls are thick with the enemy—Lord help us ! —that is a coward's prayer, and Heaven will be empty to that

cry; the shout will dissolve in echoes, because the heart is not faithful towards God. Who does not make a convenience of his religion? What coward is there who does not pray when he wants fine weather for the wedding at which he will make a sot of himself? Or who does not pray because a spirit—dim, spectral, black—is in the air, and may any moment alight upon the roof or quench the household fire? But the prayers of the wicked are an abomination unto the Lord. The air is vexed with cries of atheistic distress which want to ennoble themselves into momentary prayer.

Moses told the people of Israel exactly how the case stood, "and the people mourned greatly"; and afterwards they said they would go up, and Moses replied, "Go not up, for the Lord is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword"—your only safety is in not going up;—but the people "presumed to go up unto the hill top." They thought they were still men, though they had turned away from God. Not one of us could live a moment but for the mercy of Heaven. We have no "selves" in any sense significant of independence and self-invigoration and self-renewal; we are God's offspring. As well let the little grass-blade leap up out of its green bed and say it will live, without rooting itself in the earth or warming itself at the sun, as for us to say we will live, in any profound and immortal sense, without dependence upon the mercy and redeeming help and grace of God. We are in danger of living lives of presumption. Surely, we think, God will not remember that we have not paid him our tribute of prayer. Surely, in all the streams of praise continually flying towards his throne as towards the centre of the universe, he will not miss our little rill of adoration and confession. So we deceive ourselves. We presume: we say we will take our chance: we will go out under all circumstances, and see what can be done,—and, behold, we have put our sickle into a field of darkness, and if we bring back aught with us, we bring back sheaves of fog. There is no life without God, no true fighting without faith, no lasting conquest that does not express the righteousness that accomplished it.

The picture is most graphic. There was only a hill between

Israel and the land of promise. One stony mountain or range of hills. Surely, the space being so small some concession will be made to Israel? If God could concede one inch to the bad man, he could concede all heaven. No concessions are made to unbelief. This religious life is not a matter of proportions; we do not come into fraction and decimal here, and throw things in as if they were of no consequence. A ship may go down within ten feet of the shore; the vessel that has come proudly over the main may be wrecked in the channel. There is to be no intermission of service; no space is to be accounted trifling; no action is to be regarded as of but secondary consequence. There are no days off duty. May not a man pray six days and do what he will on the seventh? It is morally impossible. The law is one, goodness is one, loyalty is one. This is not a theological mystery: this is a simple matter of daily experience and personal proof. We cannot love our friend six days out of the seven and disregard him on the seventh. If it is impossible in human relations, how can it be possible in divine relations? Love makes all the week into a Sabbath day. Faithfulness accounts that every moment of time is due to those with whom we have covenanted as to its duties and its remuneration. Find a man who can say,—This is but one hour taken from the service which I have pledged and for which I have been paid—and you find a thief. Find a man who will take ten minutes to do a piece of work which he could easily have done in five, and will receive payment for it, or set up a right founded upon it, and you find a felon—the deadlier that the magistrate cannot lay hold upon him. These are the truths we must trust; this is the standard by which we must measure ourselves. Measuring ourselves by ourselves, who is not respectable—passable at least?—who is not upon something like an equality with his brother? But measuring ourselves by the divine standard, who would not run away into the darkness, finding his heart-ache intolerable, and his self-reproach like a scorching fire? “What I say unto one I say unto all,” said Christ, “Watch!” “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” After a long life of devoted labour, see that ye be not lost at the very last by a remission of discipline, by lightening of duty, and by the

curtailment of prayer. Having come proudly, as to divine reliance, over a thousand miles of water, see that there be no collision at the last for want of watchfulness, no breakdown for want of self-criticism. We must complete the journey; we cannot get off a few miles before the appointed landing-place. We are called to discipline. We can keep our learning, our genius, our intellectual energy, our marvellous mental capacity, and can do all kinds of conjuring with the imagination and with the tongue, and may appear unto men to be as we have ever been—(society is easily deceived)—but if we have put out the altar fire which no eye can see—if we have let the temperature of love go down—if we begin to calculate where once we were delighted to serve—if we begin to set up an argument where once we built a cross,—we may go out to fight Amalek, but the heathen will laugh at us, and the men against whom we are pitted will have us in derision. We are nothing without God; but we can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth us.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we cannot do the whole law. We have tried. One man said unto thee,—All these things have I done from my youth up. We have not done one of them; we have spoiled the whole law. We have done what we liked, and we have left undone that which we disliked. We have been partially good, but not good in the root of us, in the inner heart, in the place where the true life lives. We have a chamber of imagery in our hearts; we know the way down to it, though no other man knows of its existence. The whole head is sick; the whole heart is faint; both hands are criminals; and as for our feet, they have been swift to run in the evil way. We are clever in wickedness: we have great ability in serving the devil; but to serve God rightly, truly, constantly—who hath found it possible? God be merciful unto us sinners! Yet it is something to know that we have been ill-behaved, it is worth knowing that we have done the things we ought not to have done. We would be contrite—really broken-hearted; we would come without plea, defence, excuse—extenuation of any kind and say,—We have done the things we ought not to have done; we have left undone the things we ought to have done, and there is no health in us. Have mercy, thou living Christ of God! Thou hast shown us how we may begin again; thou art always giving the soul new opportunities. If we confess our sins, thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We will try to confess—not with our lips, for that is worthless, but with our hearts; we will let our souls talk; we will call upon our spirits to accuse themselves, and to deny their claim to any virtue, or comeliness, or beauty. There is none righteous, no not one. All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way. We have been mistaken altogether; we have lived in ill-reasoning, and we have perpetrated innumerable mistakes. Beside all this, our heart is wrong: we are rotten at the core. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. The work must be done in the heart, and thou alone canst do it. We will not marvel that thou sayest,—Ye must be born again. We know it; that is right; we answer thy declaration with a great shout of acquiescence, full of tears and sobs. Lord, give us the Holy Ghost! spare not the gift divine! Not by works of righteousness which it is possible for us to do, but according to thy mercy must thou save us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. This is God's doing; this is the miracle of the Holy Spirit. Encourage us. Thou couldst overwhelm us with despair, and so the enemy might get great advantage over us; but even in our far-away wandering, and in our obstinacy of heart, send some message after us saying the house-door is still open and Christ is mighty to redeem. Amen.

Numbers xv. 30-36.

30. But the soul that doeth aught presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

31. Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.

32. And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day.

33. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation.

34. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him.

35. And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.

36. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses.

PUNISHMENT FOR SABBATH-BREAKING.

THIS incident has been the occasion of a good deal of jeering. It has often been quoted as an instance of extreme and intolerable severity, and has been cited against those whose reading of the Scriptures leads them to propose to keep the Sabbath day. The mocker has found quite a little treasure here. The incident is altogether so monstrous. The appeal made to common sense and human feeling is so direct and so urgent that there can be no reply to it. The poor man was gathering sticks on the Sabbath day, and he had to forfeit his life for the violation of the law! If he had been gathering anything else, the fancy of the reader would not have been so suddenly struck; some grand phrase would have helped him through the difficulty; but when it was known that the poor man was only gathering "sticks," it seemed to be out of all proportion that he should lose his life. Many an amateur commentator has so spoken. No wonder. Men are the victims of phrases. Had the man been found gathering golden wedges out of other people's caskets, there might have been some proportion between the theft and the penalty; but to be gathering "sticks" and to die for it, does shock the pious fancy of heathen

mankind with a sense of disproportion. No artist would have taken this course. A man who had painted the most beautiful picture ever produced by the human fancy and the human hand, would not of course be severe with anyone who had punctured the picture with a needle all over; though he might be a little irritated with any man who set fire to his work of art. A noble-minded artist would have said,—Take no heed: it is only the puncture of a needle; if the picture had been ripped up with a knife I should have been angry, but seeing that it was but the point of a needle, perhaps it is as well done as not done; no notice should be taken of this, and no penalty shall be inflicted.—No engineer would for a moment have allowed any such sense of disproportion to occur in his plans; when he sends a locomotive whirling at lightning pace across the land, he will say to it,—If a fly should alight upon the rails you will pause; if an elephant should be there, or some mighty bird of prey, do what you will; but if a fly should be on the rail, you will stop, and in a spirit of pity, if not in a spirit of respect, you will allow the little trespasser to resume its wing. But law is impartial—terrific yet gracious. It does not work along one line only: it is a guarantee, as well as a penalty; it brings with it in one hand a crown of righteousness, as certainly as it brings in the other a sword of judgment. It is here that we get wrong: we will not grasp the idea of sovereignty, law, order, progress according to divinely-philosophical methods; we will clip, and niggle, and compromise, and patch the universe where we have injured it, and think no one will see the seams we have made. Had the text read,—And a certain man was found in the wilderness openly blaspheming God, and he was stoned to death,—we should have had some sense of rest and harmony in the mind: the balance would seem to be complete. But that is the very sophism that is ruining us. We do not see the reality of the case. We think of huge sins;—there are none. We think of little sins; there are none. We live in a region of fancy; we picture possibilities of sin. We play at the great game of jurisprudence, setting this against that, weighing, measuring, balancing, and telling-off things in definite quantities and relations. It is the spot that is ruin; it is the one little thing that spoils the universe. God cannot drive on his mighty

chariot until something has been done with those who have committed, so-called, "little sins," and have perpetrated small and almost nameless trespasses. The whole conception is wrong. We are not fallen because we have committed murder in the vulgar sense of the term. When a man commits murder, there may be some palliation for the crime; there may be a stronger defence for murder than for one evil word. It is easy to imagine how eloquence could warm up into a noble speech on behalf of the man who, carried away by a sudden gust of passion, had perpetrated some dreadful deed; but there is no eloquence that can expand itself for one moment and keep its own respect in defence of backbiting, whispering, evil-thinking and all the miserable pedantry of righteousness; on that side no advocate can be found: an advocate disdains the fee that would bribe his speech; it is mean, contemptible, indefensible. Yet we who reason so in ordinary affairs become quite amateur divinities in relation to the poor man who went out on the Sabbath day to gather a bundle of "sticks." We will look at the "sticks" and not at the Sabbath. We say,—It was but a drop of blackness;—but we forget that the robe on which it fell was a robe of ineffable purity. A drop here or there upon a garment already stained will count for nothing; but who could not see even one ink-blot on the white purity of the Jungfrau? Every eye would seem to be fastened upon it; no notice would be taken of it in the murky valley; but on that shining whiteness—on that snowy purity—it is an offence that cannot be forgiven; the man who wantonly flung that blot on such purity is a base man in his heart. Why not look at the reality of the case—of every case—of our own case—and, instead of trying to reduce the enormity by dwelling upon the relative smallness of the offence, fix the imagination and the judgment and the conscience upon the thing violated?—for only in that way can we establish the balance of righteousness and begin to understand the movement of God.

Obedience can only be tested by so-called little things. It is in relation to little things that a character stands or falls as to its wholeness and reality of good purpose. We are all prepared for state occasions. There is not a man in the world, surely, who

has not some robe of respectability he can wear on festive days and notable anniversaries. That arrangement gives no indication of the real substance and tissue of the man's character. We are all prepared to be heroic ; but a man cannot live in ostentatious heroism all his days. We are only too glad of an opportunity to play the hero ; it is an hour's work, or a day's endurance, and its history will be written in large letters, and men will speak about it, and fame will come to us,—we only long for the occasion and we will provide the man. It is quite easy to join in a great demonstrative procession to show on which side we are. Human nature does not altogether dislike processions ; there is something in the human heart that inclines it towards display. To be part of a great host, marching to the blare of trumpet and the touch of drum, all to show on which side we are, is quite an easy piece of display and is no test of obedience. Who is not ready to watch by the death-bed of the most loved one ? The night will bring no weariness—the day and the night shall be run into one common time, and no heed shall be taken of the exhaustion of the flesh ; it will be a proud delight ; the sacrifice will bring its own heaven with it. We long to show in some such crisis how loyal is our love. It is not so that life is measured by the Living One who is the Judge of all the earth ; he does not look at state occasions, at heroic opportunities, at processional displays, at death-bed attendances ; he looks at the little things of daily life. Where one man is called to be a hero on some great scale, ten thousand men are called to be courteous, gentle, patient ; where one has the opportunity of being great on the battle-field of a death-bed, all have opportunity of being good in hopefulness, charity, forgiveness, and every grace that belongs to the Cross of Christ ; where one has the opportunity of joining a great procession, ten thousand have the opportunity of assisting the aged, helping the blind, speaking a word for the speechless, and putting a donation into the hand of honest poverty. Let us realise the truth of the doctrine that we are not called upon to display our obedience upon a gigantic scale within the theatre of the universe and under the observation of angels,—but to go out into the field and work with bent back and willing hands and glad hearts, doing life's simple duty under Heaven's inspiration and encouragement. The man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath day might

have been quite a great man on festival occasions when all Israel had to be dressed in its best ; he might have been one of the foremost of the show. You discover what men are by their secret deeds, by what they do when they suppose nobody is looking, by what they are about when they are suddenly pounced upon. Give a man notice that his obedience is to be inquired into, and then how prepared he is ! But the man is not what he is at that particular moment, but what he was a few moments before, and what he will be a few moments after. It is only by so-called little things—minor moralities, punctuality, civilities, penny honesties,—that we can understand what we are and estimate the quality of the character of others.

People will always be more willing and ready to punish than to obey :—"all the congregation . . . stoned him with stones." The congregation was glad of the opportunity :—anything for a new sensation ; anything for a change from the intolerable monotony of the wilderness. Stoning a man made a little bubble on the quiet river of the day's sluggish life ; moreover, it looked well to be stoning somebody else ; there is a kind of indirect respectability about it. What a heroic people ! You would not judge from this verse what a history we have read through up to the time of its being written in the record. These are not the people who mourned, and murmured, and complained, and rebelled against Moses and fought against Heaven, and turned away from righteousness and forgot the Living God ? They are unanimous in stoning the Sabbath-breaker ; they would have been equally as unanimous in stoning Moses. A word has no sense when it comes to decision and distinctions of this kind. We are all, perhaps, more ready to punish than to obey ; when we condemn the action of another, we seem to add to our own piety in public estimation. Herein we do not live in the Mosaic day. Is there no stoning under the Christian dispensation ? Yes. By what rule is that stoning determined ? A very easy one and most equitable. Christ laid it down, and Christ is our one Law-giver—the true Moses of the Church. We bring a man to him, saying,—Lord, we found this man gathering sticks on the Lord's day,—what is to be done to him ? Stone him. How ? "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone." And beginning at the eldest, right away down to the youngest, they all slink out

and leave the sabbath-breaker to face the Founder of the day. That is the right law of stoning—may it never be changed ! Jesus, Son of God, thou wast never so dear to human hearts, conscious of their guilt and burning with shame, as when thou didst say to the pious hypocrites of thy time,—“Let him that is without sin cast the first stone” ;—thou art Saviour ; these words will keep thy crown above all other crowns, long as the ages of time shall breathe, or the larger ages of eternity roll on in infinite duration. “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” There must be punishment, but let us take care how it is administered. If there be no stone-throwing until pure hands begin, no stones will be thrown. We are speaking now within the boundaries of the Church, within the sanctities of the holy place,—not of political and municipal life, but of that inner and spiritual existence and relation explained in the person and priesthood of the Son of God.

We must not delude ourselves with the notion that there are sins which are of no consequence. We say that the man in question may be guilty of telling a lie, but he was never guilty of committing a murder. What is the difference ? There is none. You say,—He may be a little unforgiving, but he never murdered anyone ;—therefore we invite him to dinner, we travel with him on the road, we recognise him in public, we cheer him when he rises to address a Christian assembly on Christian topics. We say,—Such and such a man may be a little censorious in speech, but he was never known to be drunk. What is the difference ? There is more said in the Bible against pride than is said against drunkenness ; there is more said in the Bible against censoriousness than is said against unchastity. We are wrong. We are back among the beggarly elements ; we have not come into the sanctuary in which we see spiritual doctrine, spiritual judgment, heart-work ; and until we enter that holy place and read the smallest print of the divine record, do not let us suppose we can rival the kingdom of God or annotate with our pointless comments the wisdom of Heaven. The kingdom of heaven is within. Piety is not abstinence from vulgar crime : it is consecration to spiritual purpose and perpetual aspiration after spiritual ideals. Whoso hateth his brother without a cause is guilty of murder. He who has told a lie will break the Sabbath. He who has broken God's

Sabbath—understanding that term in its amplest meaning and intention—has violated to the measure of his power the purity and sanctity of Heaven. The law is one; the universe is one; God is one. He that offendeth in the least offendeth in all. But we cannot have new works till we become new workers, and we cannot become new workers except by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost. Said the Son of God,—“Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again.”

NOTE.

The Seventh Day in every week was “set apart” as a day in which no work was to be done; the seventh year was “set apart” as a year in which no seed was to be sown; and at the end of seven times seven years, there was a great festival during which the whole land was to rest, and when debts were to be cancelled, alienated estates to return to their owners, and slaves to be set free.

Consecrated Men, consecrated Property, consecrated Space, consecrated Time, declared that God still claimed the world as his own, and that in all the provinces of human life he insisted on being recognised as Lord of all.

The separation of the Sabbath from the common uses of other days was an essential part of a vast and complicated system for the assertion and maintenance of certain great spiritual ideas. I do not wonder at the severity of the penalty attached to the crime of Sabbath-breaking. The high-priest himself was forbidden, under the penalty of death, to enter the Holy of Holies on any other than the Day of Atonement. To violate the sanctity of that mysterious chamber was a profanation of the Space which God claimed as his own; to violate the Sabbath was a profanation of the Time which God claimed as his own. The defence of the sanctity of the Sabbath was exceptionally necessary in the early times of Jewish history. Before synagogues were built and public worship was celebrated in every part of the country, the vast majority of the people, but for the institution of the Sabbath, would have been seldom reminded of God, except when they went up to Jerusalem to keep the great feasts. The weekly rest from their common labour was a constantly recurring appeal to them to remember the God of their fathers.—*DR. DALE'S Ten Commandments.*

PRAAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, when thou dost hide thyself from us the time is long and weary even to intolerableness; when thou dost light up the horizon with the spring time then all things are beautiful and full of joy, and the whole earth is a beautiful sanctuary. We love thee to be near us; when thou art near we are safe; when thou art near we are without timidity or distress of any kind. We say,—The Lord hath called us up, therefore will we be safe, though the enemy press upon us with a heavy hand and threaten us with deadly frowning. Our confidence is in God, not only in his almightiness, but in his eternal, immeasurable affection for us; his great heart, his perpetual love—the love that died that we might live. We will count upon God; he shall be the centre of our calculation. When we think of the future, we will think of the great future, eternity; and not of the little fretful future, to-morrow—full of vexation and noise and angry tumult. We bless thee that we have the foresight that sees eternity, whilst our eyes are holden that they may not see to-morrow. Thou dost give long sight to thy Church. Thou wilt not permit us to pry into the next day, but thou hast given us revelations concerning the next world. This is thy wonderful way. Thou dost move by vast lines. Thou wouldest draw us forward by a wondrously-comprehensive education. We bless thee for the largeness of the wisdom by which we are governed, as well as for the depth of the love by which we are saved and redeemed for ever. Thou dost look upon us; thou dost watch us body, soul, and spirit; no part of us is exposed to the divine neglect; thou dost see our hand, our foot, our heart; thou lookest into us altogether, and if there is any evil way in us thou art troubled by its wicked presence. Do thou give us to feel this, and to say, morning, noon and night,—Thou God seest me—not lookest upon me only, but seest me in every thought, feeling, motive, purpose,—in the whole interior mystery of our being. Thus our life will be spent in heaven's light, and all our days shall be numbered and shall be regarded from on high. All the way is thine. Such a varied way it is: sometimes all sward, green and soft and velvet-like, with hedges on either side, rich with blossom, musical with song; and sometimes it is all gates, and stiles, and difficult places: the roads are many, and large, and rough, and the way altogether is without hospitality or comfort; still it is part of the long mileage—part of the way ending in the brightest land. May we accept all the road, even through the churchyard, and through the desert, and across the river, and up the steep hill, and believe that the way is all regulated and determined for us by the wisdom of the infinite Father. We bless thee if we have any hope in this direction, for it is natural to us to be frivolous, superficial, living in the present moment, and if we can extract a laugh from

it, accounting our life a happy one—such fools and empty in head and heart are we; but if thy kingdom has touched us with its glory and ennobled us by its sublimity so that now and again even we have larger thoughts, nobler purposes, wider outlooks, behold, we thank thee for this increase of life; and now we understand in part what Jesus Christ meant when he said,—I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly—like wave upon wave of life, a great river of life, pure as crystal, beginning in God's throne, and winding its wondrous way back to its own origin. We would be wise—sometimes we think so at least; we would live the noble life, free from all canker, care, and distress; we would dwell in God; we would say in the time of thirst,—The river of God is full of water,—and in the time of famine,—The wheatfields of heaven are never exhausted. Thus living in the upper liberties—in the very heavens of the divine presence—we would do to-day's work with a clear head, a loving heart, and a willing hand, and count all life a sacrifice that it may become a joy. Thou hast brought thy people together from varied homes into one house. This is a hint of the great meeting,—the eternal fellowship: men shall be brought from all lands, and with all accents shall sing one song. We hope in this: we would not have this sacred forecast overclouded; it makes time easy, and labour light, and suffering but a momentary pang. We give ourselves, our houses, our businesses—all into thine hands. We want to succeed, we are determined to succeed, we are ashamed of failure, and we will resolve again and again to make life a solid success; but when we have made this resolution, if our idea of success be wrong, we are willing that it should be foregone, and that we should die without house, or friend, or helper, if it be better for our soul's health that our body should thus decay. We will put ourselves into the Father's hand, without wish, or will, or thought, or desire, that we cannot subordinate to his purposes: we will utter our little prayer, and then leave God to give what answer he may. But to one prayer thou wilt return the answer which we need. God be merciful unto us sinners; wash us in the atoning blood of Christ; speak out of the mystery of eternity to this guilty time, and say to every soul,—Son, daughter, thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee. Amen.

Numbers xv. 37-41.

37. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

38. Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue:

39. And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring:

40. That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.

41. I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God.

THE FRINGES AND THEIR MEANING.

THE word *garments* is used with a special direction. The Lord was very careful about the raiment or garment of his people. The Lord's eyes are upon his people's apparel. We want to make him simply a Figure in theology—to confine him within the radiant lines of what to us is an invisible heaven. But God will not so be treated. He lives with us in the house ; he will make our bed in our affliction ; he will turn the house round that it may catch the morning light, if the morning light is best for us. He will keep our books, and watch all our steps ; he will conduct the blind man across the busy thoroughfare, and he will set a singing bird in the poor man's little house. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." Why make a theological fancy of God ? That is practical blasphemy. It is not worship ; it is ill-treatment of the divine idea and the divine personality. God would have a seat in our house, a desk in our business, a pen in our library ; he would rule our whole life, and make us his companions and friends. From the first he took an interest in the raiment of the people ; he knew that poverty was no transient distress, but a part of the general life of the human family ; so he made arrangements even about pawnbroking, saying, "If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down" (Exod. xxii. 26.) Pawnbroking was to be but for a few bright hours of the day ; as soon as the chill evening came down the pledge was to be restored. Why ? The garment referred to was a large four-square cloth ; in the middle of it a hole was cut through which the head could pass, so that the whole cloth fell round the body of the wearer. That garment was both a day garment and a blanket for the night. Allowing, therefore,—such would seem to be the divine reasoning—that a man can do without his outer cloth for a few hours whilst the sun is shining—for the sunshine is a kind of cloak—yet remember that the nights are cold and thy neighbour must not be allowed to lie down to sleep without being properly covered. This is what the Lord says in so many words in Exodus xxii. 27 : "For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin : wherein shall

he sleep ? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear ; for I am gracious." Let us understand the meaning of this gospel tone. When the cold man cries because for want of his raiment he cannot sleep—when he had to pawn his raiment for bread,—“I will hear” his cry. What is the reason for hearing the cry ?—“for I am gracious”—I care for men who cannot sleep because of the cold ; I care for children who cannot sleep because they are hungry ; the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, how then can I forget my own image and likeness ?—my heart hears : my heart responds. At the four corners of this cloth were four tassels or fringes. The tassels or fringes were called *Craspeda*. Great sanctity was attached to these tassels by the Jews : hence the poor woman's declaration : “If I may but touch a *Craspedon* I shall be healed.” We miss the whole meaning of the passage by thinking of the hem of the garment in the ordinary sense of the term. The garment was four-square ; the head was put through it ; at each of the corners there was a fringe or a tassel ; each tassel was called a *Craspedon* ; each tassel was regarded with great seriousness by the Jewish mind ; it represented great thoughts, and even the divine presence itself : hence the poor woman, knowing this, said within herself—“If I may but touch one of the tassels—if I may but touch one of the fringes, I shall be healed.” So these *Craspeda* were not mere ornaments in dress : they were full of typical ideas, if not of moral virtues. Speaking of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus Christ says (Matthew xxiii. 5)—“They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments”—they are great in tassels and fringes : they enlarge them that they may in some way write upon them words from the law, and appear unto men, not only to be very learned in wisdom, but to be excellent patterns of virtue. The ordinary tassel was not enough for the Pharisee ; the customary fringe is too small for the pedantic scribe, therefore the fringes must be enlarged, the writings must be multiplied, and a more ostentatious display of virtue must be made to the public eye.

Is all this passed and done with ? It can never be obsolete so long as human nature is human nature. If the Lord permit us to wear a fringe or a tassel, or any outward and typical sign of

adoption and sonship, we are by so much exposed to insidious and mighty temptation. Yet we must have something to look at and something to touch, for we ourselves are in the body, and all the creation that we can see is a creation tangible, substantial, full of allegorical writing, it may be, which only skilled eyes can read. Still this visible creation must have some correspondence in the invisible creation into which we are called through Christ, the Keeper of the kingdom. We cannot be trained according to divine purpose except we have the outward, the material, and the visible. These gifts are of divine appointment. God recognises our need of them, and he supplies them, and names them, and specifies their uses. But who can be trusted with line or image, with tassel or fringe, with book or censer,—with anything that appeals to the eye and the touch, without misunderstanding God and exaggerating the purpose of the thing visible and tangible, and thus passing through into all manner of superstition and idolatry? God has given us tassels and fringes to the great garment of the spiritual gift in Christ Jesus his Son, and we have misunderstood them, and what were divine gifts to begin with have been turned into temptations by which our worship has fallen into a species of feeble or contemptible idolatry. God has given us the Sabbath day. A most beautiful gift if we could have regarded it within the divine intention, and have accepted God's sweet purpose implied in the great donation; but we must needs meddle with it and enlarge the tassel, and make broad the phylacteries and the borders, and write upon God's spring day all manner of narrow-minded and evil writing of our own invention; or we must needs make hard what God made soft with pity, and gracious with love; we must make the day into the sourest of the week, instead of the smile of the passing time; we must be pedantic, stern, iron-bound, exacting in a most narrow-minded and despotic degree;—and this we do to show our noble piety! This is Pharisaism. We condemn ancient Pharisaism the more vehemently that we do not understand what we are condemning, for ignorance has no bounds. But let us be careful whilst we recognise the divine tassel, fringe, or ribband of blue, that we accept it in God's sense, and with God's limitation and purpose;—then it shall be unto us Heaven's own sign—a visible thing by which we enter into invisible meanings

and invisible liberties. But Pharisaic virtue will be meddling ; it will add one hour to the Sabbath day : it will begin a little earlier than was at first intended ; it will make its face sour and its fingers hard, and it will lay upon people exactions intolerable, whilst it, by some way unknown to the people, will sneak off to the enjoyment of its own wicked luxuries. In this way the fringe of the Sabbath has been enlarged by Pharisaic impiety and ostentation, and the sweet idea of sleep, rest, renewal, reinvigoration,—worship, psalm, sacrifice of a spiritual kind,—all these have been subordinated or lost. He does not keep the Sabbath who merely talks about it. Sabbath-keeping is an affair of the heart. You cannot keep the Sabbath by Act of Parliament ; you may close every business in the kingdom by imperial statute, but when you have done so, unless there be a consenting heart, every place devoted to business in the kingdom is more open on the Sabbath than it was on the common week day. We must cultivate love of the Sabbath spirit before we can have obedience to the Sabbath law ; we must recall the idea of Christ's resurrection and believe in its historical reality, or we cannot have a day to celebrate what never took place. We do not keep the birthdays of people who were never born. The birthday represents a historical reality in the family—an advent, a sweet epiphany, an incoming of a stranger who shall never be stranger more. Lose the idea of the birth, and the birthday must go ; lose the idea of the resurrection of Christ, and the Sabbath will come only to be misunderstood, and will pass away in contempt or in violation of its claims.

The Lord has given us two tassels called the Sacraments. Look at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It was meant as a memorial ; it was a sublime appeal to the memory of the heart. Said the dying Son of God,—“This do in remembrance of me.” A simple feast : a Supper which the poorest man can have at his own little deal table, if so be he will drink one little drop of water and taste one crumb of bread,—nay, he can even do without these things if he eat and drink with the Spirit. Into what enlargement of priestly pomp and meaning has that Sacrament been brought ! What magic has been used over the bread and the cup ! What with transubstantiation and consubstantiation, and all the polysyllables of the theologues, we have lost the

Supper. Memory has now next to no function to perform in connection with that Sacrament. The priest must operate upon the elements, some mysterious process must take place in the bread and in the cup; and not until such priestly pranks have been played may the common people touch these things,—nay, in some churches, they may not touch them at all, especially one of the elements: it is enough if the priest drink in some kind of representative capacity. They have enlarged the borders of their garments. The blue ribband was right, the fringe was of divine appointment, God meant the robe to have its tassels; but we have enlarged and vitiated and perverted and played all manner of tricks, and exercised every possible species of invention. “God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions”—and God does not know the tassels he appointed because of the enlargements and the discolourings invented and accomplished by depraved human genius.

God has given us another tassel in the Bible. He knew we could not do without a book: he made the Bible as small as possible; never book had so much matter crushed into it—every line a living stem of a living vine; the very punctuation seems to be part of the common vitality. But it is possible to make a fetish or idol of the Bible; it is possible to make it a mere gathering of isolated texts to be fingered by men as they may be pleased to manipulate the thousand beads of heaven. So we have the Bible misunderstood—little detached texts thrust into wrong perspective and relation. We have lost the Biblical spirit in pedantic reverence for the Biblical letter. We have never yet seen in all its fulness that the letter is trying to tell something which it can never tell in all the amplitude of its meaning, and we have been afraid lest we should lose the spirit by not properly regarding the letter. Believe me, God’s Book is a revelation. Everything is contained in it. The Book cannot be enlarged by human hands: it enlarges itself. You can enlarge the loaf of bread by your hands whilst that loaf is in process of formation, but you must keep your fingers off the growing blade and ear of wheat; let the baker deal with the dough—he may not touch that living, golden thing which, through great agony and travail down in the darkness, has pierced the sod and come breathingly and lovingly up into the mellowing and ripening light. It is

even so with God's Book. It needs no vindication. Your manufactured bread may need to be announced and weighed and justified to the public examiner and the public taste; but God's wheat is not to be so regarded. How it grew he has never told us; in all the information he has conveyed to the human family, he has never told us where the wind is, how the wheat grows; he has kept these things—so palpable and obvious in their appearances—to himself, as to the secret of their origin and movement. The vindication which the Bible asks for is to be seen, to be read. The Bible does not begin at the Book of Kings, or in the middle of the volume; the Bible—simple as the statement may appear—begins at the beginning, where so few people have ever begun; they have used the Bible as if it began nowhere, and could be opened promiscuously and understood in the most casual manner. The Bible has its own beginning, its own line of evolution, and it must be begun and perused according to its own genesis and law if its music is to be heard, and if human life is to fall into rhythm with its majestic purpose. Nothing is easier than to pervert the Bible. More mischief can be done by incompetent persons talking about the Bible and in its favour than ever can be done by the most skilful and obstinate assailants of its inspiration. The Bible has more to fear from its friends than from its enemies. I will vary the phrase and say, the Bible has nothing to fear from opposition; sometimes even it may tremble under the shadow of patronage.

All these—the Sabbath, the Sacraments, the Bible, the Sanctuary—are divine institutions, tassels ordained and declared in heaven; but we must be careful to ascertain where the divine ends and the human begins. The Pharisees have meddled with the fringes; the scribes have performed magical tricks upon the tassels. It is so with the ministry of the Gospel. The ministry of the Gospel is a divine institution; but how we have meddled with it and made it less in trying to make it larger! The ministry of the Gospel is a ministry of brotherhood, sympathy—great human love. It has been made into a priestly trick and has been invested with sacerdotal sanctions, and men—constables of their own appointment—have stood at the pulpit stairs to keep away persons who were supposed not to be authorised. The

great authorisation of the preacher is first of God, and next of the common people. The common people will soon tell you whom God has called to the ministry. The congregation is judge. You cannot deceive the great common heart; it knows the elect man: the very first sentence he utters is recognised as genuine or as counterfeit. The people, the common people, all the people,—they stand next to God in this matter:—“*Vox populi, vox Dei.*” The question has sometimes been asked—Do the common people hear us “gladly”? That question ought not to be asked until another has been answered: Do we preach to the common people—in great human words, in tears of compassion, in genuine, manly, Christian sympathy? Blessed be God, the common people will never listen to theology, to polysyllables, to wordy refinements. The common people can understand the sunshine and respond to its sublimity; but they cannot understand many of the lights which men have invented and patented and heavily charged for. So with truth. The great fringe truth has been enlarged by opinions. Opinion has been enthroned. Not until we distinguish between truth and opinion can we distinguish between God’s fringe and the Pharisee’s phylactery. When any man has spoken—whatever his name, intellectual capacity, moral pith, or rhetorical eloquence—he has only announced a series of opinions. He can so announce them as to make himself ridiculous, offensive, as to usurp a divine position. But the truth underlies opinion, is different from opinion, admits of great variety of opinion. As the sun will grow all kinds of flowers, and the good old mother earth will let all flowers grow within the bounds of her hospitality, so truth will admit of all shades of opinion, all varieties of expression. Why can we not recognise this, and clasp hands in spiritual brotherhood, every man having a right to his own opinion and being bound to society in nothing but in the reality and sincerity of his soul?

We must not go the other extreme, and do away with profession—tear off the ribband of blue, and the fringe on the borders of the garment, and say,—We will have nothing more to do with these things. They are all divine appointments. The sanctuary is God’s; the coming together of men to worship is itself a holy act. You cannot worship individually, in the fullest

sense of the term. What is an individual? There is no such thing; society has rendered that impossible. God is the Author of society; God is the Author of humanity. Only in some narrow or limited sense can a man offer any worship in solitude. He is part of a band—a great organisation built for music. In some sense it may be true that a man considerably under six feet high may take hold of a gun and sword and say he will go out and fight as an individual wherever the war may be; but such an action needs hardly to be named to bring upon itself the contempt which it deserves. The individual is part of a larger individuality; the person is part of the larger person called the army. To your ranks! To your regiments! When the trumpet-blast sounds, it sounds an appeal and an instruction to the whole body of men. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is. A man who is not a church-goer is a bad man, in some sense, or an incomplete man in others; he has fallen below a right comprehension of human relations and social connections and reciprocations. Behold the solitary wanderer who has gone away by himself on the holy Sabbath morning!—he is going to “hear the birds sing” and “the brooks ripple and gurgles,” and “see the hyacinths and the violets”—behold him there! Was ever irony more complete? He has missed the divine idea. He should have said,—No; to the centre! to the meeting-place! to the rendezvous!—together, all together,—common prayer, common song, common study; and then radiate as you please, carrying the public personality with the narrow individualism, and enlarging the little unit by the infinite completeness of human nature. We need some outward help. We love to hear somebody pray when we are very lonely and dyingly sick. To hear another human voice is a hint of fellowship, a hint of consolidation, a hint of heaven. We could pray by ourselves, mayhap. Not altogether. It will do us good if some man has force enough to pray aloud; the very audibleness of the speech will bring a kind of society into the chamber; we shall feel the larger by hearing some sympathetic voice arguing, pleading, with God; the walls of the chamber will be broken down and the boundary line will be a horizon, the roof will be removed and the blue ceiling will be heaven. We need the Sabbath day, the memorial

Sacraments, the Holy Book, the preaching man, the fellow-suppliant, the congregation; but let us take care not to make more of these tassels than God intended. Let us take care lest by enlarging the fringe we destroy its meaning.

NOTE.

THE LAW OF FRINGES.—According to Herodotus, the dress of the Egyptians consisted of a linen garment, over which was worn a white woollen cloak or shawl. The former, which seems to have been often, if not generally, worn without the other, was fringed at the bottom. Concerning the form of this fringe perhaps nothing positive can be determined. Some endeavour to ascertain its character by examining the two Hebrew words by which it is expressed, צִיצִית *tzizith*, in the present text, and גְּדִילִים *gedilim*, in Deut. xxii. 12. The former of these words elsewhere (as in Ezek. viii. 3) means a lock of hair; and the latter a rope, such as that with which Delilah bound Samson (Judges xiv. 11, 12); and it is hence imagined that these fringes consisted of many threads which hung like hair, and were twisted like a rope. The “ribband” probably was either a blue *thread* twisted with a white one through the whole fringe, or a lace by which the fringe was fastened to the edge of the garment. Many commentators of authority think, from the explanation in Deut. xxii., that the “fringes” were no other than strings with tassels at the end, fastened to the four corners of the upper garment, the proper use of these strings being to fasten the corners together. Of this opinion are the modern Jews. What *they* understand by the direction of the text appears from Levi’s description of the *tzizith* or robe in question. It is made of two square pieces with two long pieces like straps joined to them, in order that one of the said pieces may hang down before upon the breast, and the other behind; at the extremity of the four corners are fastened the strings, each of which has five knots besides the tassel, signifying the five books of the law. The rabbins, under whose instruction this profound analogy has been established, further observe that each string consisted of eight threads, which, with the number of knots and the numeral value of the letters in the word *tzizith*, make 613, which is, according to them, the exact number of the precepts in the law. From this they argue the importance of this command, since he who observes it, they say, in effect observes the whole law! The law seems to require that the fringes should be constantly worn; but as it would not consist with the costume of the countries through which the Jews are now dispersed to wear the fringed garment as an external article of dress, every Jew makes use of two—a large one which is used only at prayers, and on some other occasions, and is then worn externally, and a small one which is constantly worn as an under-garment. The principal denomination of this article is *Tzizith*, on account of the fringes, in which all its sanctity is supposed to consist; but the proper name of the vestment itself is *Talith*, and by this it is commonly distinguished.

There have been various conjectures as to the object of this law. The most probable is that the “fringe” was intended as a sort of badge or livery, by which, as well as by circumcision and by the fashion of their beards, and by their peculiar diet, the Hebrews were to be distinguished from other people. Be this as it may, much superstition came in the end to be connected with the use of these fringes. The Pharisees are severely censured by our Saviour for the ostentatious hypocrisy with which they made broad the “borders” of their garments.—*Pictorial Commentary*.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, to thy throne; we come as if by right of love. Surely we have no right of conduct. Our behaviour would turn us away from places of light, but because of a love thou hast created in the heart we cannot be content with darkness; we yearn towards the morning; we would stand up in places full of glory and take part in every hymn of praise which celebrates thy pity and thy grace. This is the Lord's working in our hearts, this is the seal divine, this is the signature of Heaven; there is none like it, there is no mistaking it. We feel what we cannot explain—that we have been born into a new life, have laid hold of a new relation, and are now standing in the strength and comfort of a covenant that cannot be broken. If for a moment we doubted this, we should be as men who think the clouds have put out the sun; we should reason wrongly, and make perverted use of thy promises and ministries in the soul. Yet it is difficult sometimes not to think that the sun is dead, that the clouds have conquered at last, and that the air is mightier than light. Thou wilt pity us herein, for our ignorance is our commendation as well as our infirmity. If we own it, thou wilt displace it by wisdom; if we obstinately cling to it, we may suffer the penalty of our folly. We are of yesterday and know nothing. We will not reason before thee; we will that thou wilt reason with us; so there shall be no argument on our side, except the argument of listening well, fixing upon thee the attention of our love and looking at thee with eyes of hunger. With this thou wilt be satisfied. Thou delightest in our upward look; to thee it is a great speech without words, a longing of the heart, a quick beating of the pulses. Behold, thou art worshipped by all the world in this form or in that; but it is after thee the nations yearn. They do not all know it, nor could many of them explain it, and some might even deny it; but, Lord, the earth groaneth for thee, and the peoples of the world are looking wistfully for thy coming. This day we all worship thee: some through the moles and the bats, some through hideous images; those of broader and livelier imagination through the sun and moon and stars, the dawning east and the purpling west; and some in this way and in that: some truly, wisely, by way of revelation, grasping the Cross, seeing the propitiatory Blood, owning the mighty Name, and sealing every prayer with the name of Christ; but the whole earth is thine. In our littleness we reject and classify and distinguish, but in thy greatness thou dost see the inner meaning of things—the spiritual purpose, the ultimate design, and thou wilt judge righteous judgment and save many whom we would lose. We come before thee with different forms and conceptions of worship, but thou wilt interpret the motive and answer the heart's desire. Hear the little child, who can but say, FATHER, and then wait in troubled silence because

other and equal words will not come ; tell him it is the greatest prayer—the unfinished cry, and the cry that never can be finished. Hear the sinner—broken, shattered, and confounded, who can but sob,—God be merciful to me a sinner. Stop him there as thou dost stop men who have built a whole tower ; there is no need for further word, or speech, or plea ; thou wilt stop it with an infinite reply, and come with much of blessing, yea, with festival and banqueting of soul to those who are alive at every point, who commune with thee in high imagining, in gracious fellowship, in tender yearning, through every form possible to the human mind, through all the mediums open to the access of the creature ; and thus give a portion of meat to each in due season, and make us all forget the difference of way, and speech, and degree, in the enthusiasm of a common thankfulness, the burning of a unanimous love. We put ourselves into thy keeping. They are well kept whom thou keepest. Stand by the gate ; watch the way to the heart ; set a burning word near the tree of life to keep it from all trespass. Help us to do our duty bravely, wisely, tenderly, as strong and trustful hearts should do it. May we walk through the night as if it were a new form of day, may we plunge into the sea assured that the plunge will divide the waters, and may we face the wilderness as if it were a garden planted from on high ; and when the way is beauteous and summer-lighted, full of song and sweetness and manifold delight, keep us from its fascinations and help us to make it but a dim, poor symbol of the paradise and the heavens which we have yet to realise. Amen.

Numbers xvi.

EVERY MAN IN HIS PLACE.

THIS is strikingly modern in its temper. This ancient democracy has steadily kept pace with the ages and is at this moment as lively and audacious as ever. It is hard for men to keep their places ; it is hard because the next higher place appears to be so near and so accessible. It is always difficult for the heart to be quiet, contented, restful in God ; it is fertile in plan, ambitious in spirit, conscious of great power, and not wholly unconscious of great deserts. But men fritter away their strength by finding fault with their positions. We can only work really and deeply, and therefore lastingly, as we have the blessed consciousness of being where God has put us, and doing the kind of service God has indicated. The appointment may be an inferior one, but it is divine, and, therefore, if we answer it with faithfulness and obedience, we shall find in the discharge of its duties sweet comfort and a continual re-invigoration of our best motive and purpose. The people who rebelled against Moses had inferior appointments in connection with the *taber-*

nacle ; but they were not content with these : they actually sought not only the priesthood, but, according to the literal translation, the high-priesthood. They would have censers such as Aaron himself used ; they would try what they could do on the throne ; they did not see any reason why they should be excluded from the very pontificate of Israel. Who ever did see any reason why he should not be a great man ? It is expecting much of human nature to expect it to be just what it is, and to accept the position simply, loyally, gratefully ;—but only in such acceptance of position can men be their best and do their best. Let a preacher once get it into his mind that he ought to move in a larger circle and have a pulpit twice the size of his present pulpit, and the ambition which moves his mind in that direction, takes away from him much of his working strength, so that, instead of filling the little sphere, or the sphere comparatively small, he shrinks within it and becomes for all effective service a smaller man than he really is. Let us accept our position whatever it be, saying,—God put me here, he takes care of me while I am here, and when he wants me in some larger place he will send for me, and until the message comes I will serve him with both hands diligently, and my heart shall be as a fire burning up towards him in aspiration and sacrifice.

What a picture life is with regard to personal position and social gradation !—and we cannot alter the picture ; do what we may, still the graduated lines are plainly written, and they constitute a kind of unnamed but verily inspired Bible. There are men who are as Moses and Aaron amongst us, and there are men who are as Korah, and Dathan, and Abiram. Outbreaks of temper do occur in regard to social position and influence. The question will arise,—“Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven ?” —but all complainings arise and perish without touching the settled and determined lines of personal function, and social gradation, and ecclesiastical and other relationships. There is a tide in these things, as in the sea, and no Canute can roll back the advancing water. It is not enough to assent to these propositions ; the aim of their statement is to constitute itself into a noble persuasion to adopt them and to make them part of the rule and guide of life. Moses said,—If this is the case, meet me to-morrow ; bring your censers, put fire therein, and put incense

before the Lord to-morrow; and whom the Lord chooses, let him be pontiff. That is the only appeal. The battle has been settled ten thousand times, and still the war of ambition rages in the human heart. The morrow came; the competitors were there; what became of them we know. It would be difficult to believe the letter of this ancient history if we did not see the same fate happening to every Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in our own day. Modern facts help us to receive the testimony of ancient history. In all the departments of life there are men who are as Moses and Aaron. Take any department of life that may first occur to the imagination. Shall we say the department of commerce? Even in the market-place we have Moses and Aaron, and they cannot be deposed. Where is the man who thinks he could not conduct the largest business in the city? Yet the poor cripple could not conduct it, and the greatest punishment that could befall the creature would be to allow him to attempt to rule a large and intricate commercial concern. But it seems to be hard for a man to see some other man at the very head of commercial affairs whose word is law, whose signature amounts to a species of sovereignty, and to know that all the while he, the observer, is, in his own estimation, quite as good a man—a person of remarkable capacity, and he is only waiting for an opportunity to wear a nimbus of glory—a halo of radiance—that would astound the exchanges of the world. But it cannot be done. There are great business men and small business men: there are wholesale men and retail men, and neither the wholesale nor the retail affects the quality of the man's soul, or the destiny of the man's spirit; but, as a matter of fact, these distinctions are made, and they are not arbitrary: in the spirit of them there is a divine presence. If men could believe this, they would be comforted accordingly. Every preacher knows in his inmost soul that *he* is fit to be the Dean of St. Paul's, or the Dean of Westminster,—every preacher knows that; but to be something less—something officially lower—and yet to accept the inferior position with a contentment which is inspired by faith in God, is the very conquest of the Spirit of heaven in the heart of man, is a very miracle of grace. Even the Apostle Paul required education in this matter—"for," said he, "I have learned,"—referring to a process of daily education—"in what-

soever state I am, therewith to be content." Shall we take the department of poetry? As a matter of fact, even in that department there are some men higher than others. It is an astounding thing that there should be in the department of poetry some men who can make poetry, and some men who can only read it. How difficult to believe that the man who has made two lines rhyme cannot write the "Idylls of the King"! There is always the secret hope that the development may come late; it is an ineffable comfort to know that some men reached their highest influence at a very remote period of life. Who made these men different? Who made one man able to make paper and another man able to write upon it as the great poets have written? We cannot be atheistic in presence of such facts. We may differ about the name to be applied, but there is the absolute fact—that even in the region of poetry, some men can make it and other men cannot. When it is made, there is no mistake about it; the heart answers the appeal; the world waits to see where the fire will fall, and when it has fallen there is no mistaking the answer of the human observer. We know the Bible by the reading of it; we know inspiration by the sharing of it; we feel that the stranger beside us is a guest from heaven, because he makes our heart burn within us. We did not make ourselves; we must not attempt to appoint ourselves. We must remember that we are not our own: that we are the flock of God—the sheep of his pasture: that he formed us, and not we ourselves: that the very hairs of our head are all numbered, and that in the Father's house there are many mansions. "O, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him; and he will give thee thine heart's desire,"—or, if not, he will give thee some larger blessing, showing the capacity of the heart is not the measure of the divine bounty.

Moses took the only course that was open to him. It is no use arguing with men as to greatness: let the appeal be to experience; let us come to the testimony of fact. This applies to the pre-eminence of the Cross of Christ. Many a Korah, Dathan, and Abiram has said to the Cross,—Thou dost take too much upon thee. The Cross says,—Let the appeal be to history, to fact, to power. The Cross never claims to be accepted without examination, and testing, and competition in some sacred and

noble sense of that term. Philosophy has said,—I can save the world, and as for thee, thou grim Cross, thou takest too much upon thee ; thou art broad in sentimental appeal, but I am subtle in all my researches and fundamental in all my relations and my instructions. The Cross is willing that philosophy should be tried. It has been tried. It has a beautiful voice, a delicate touch, an eye that sees in the darkness. The Cross does not despise the love of wisdom—which is the true definition of philosophy ;—but philosophy cannot touch the whole life : it touches certain men, appeals with great effect to certain qualities of men : it speaks to men of large capacity or of ample leisure, to persons who have time to give to the study of philosophy proper attention ; but philosophy, as ordinarily understood, does not get into the universal heart, does not cover the universal experience, does not rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep ; it lacks what the Cross has—the patience, the sympathy, the long hand that reaches into the heart's innermost necessity and ministers to the life's profoundest need. Morality says to the Cross,—Thou dost take too much upon thee ; I can make the world what it ought to be. And the Cross says,—Let the appeal be to history ; let the appeal be to facts ; let us abide by the arbitrament of reality. So morality comes with small recipes and nostrums and codes of behaviour, and bills of discipline, and insists upon registering human behaviour according to certain more or less pedantic laws ; but morality never touches the world's deepest wound ; morality is, according to its own verbal definition, a manner, a posture, a calculated attitude, a providence based upon a species of arithmetic. So philosophy, morality, imagination, new schemes, new books, have all arisen to challenge the supremacy of the Cross. Is the Cross not a philosophy ? The Cross is the profoundest of all philosophy, though it does not come to the world under that name, but under some tenderer designation. Is not the Cross a morality ? The Cross insists upon righteousness ; it will have nothing to do with wickedness ; it seeks to purge human nature of its depravity. It does not begin with codes of behaviour, but with regeneration—with the new or second birth of the heart, and out of that will come clean hands, a pure tongue, a noble speech, a charitable disposition, and a sacrificial service of the world. So we do not

separate Christianity from philosophy, morality, imagination, great and intellectual speculation ; but we put these things all in their right places and relations, and the appeal of Christianity is an appeal to sinners, to lost men, to hearts that cannot heal themselves, to a ruin complete and absolute ; afterwards we come to high thinking, brilliant speculation, a very apocalypse of vision and wonder and gracious delight. So Christianity asks for no quarter upon any arbitrary or superstitious grounds ; it is willing that to-morrow every Korah, Dathan, and Abiram shall meet it, and let the contest be settled by experience. Christianity can call upon a thousand men to speak in its name and ten thousand times ten thousand more day by day. Let the question be—What has most deeply touched your life ? What has given you the surest and strongest hope under the pressure of a guilty conscience, the charges of an accusing memory ? What has touched your tears most lovingly and healingly ? What was it that sat up with you longest in the dark night time ? What was it that found for you flowers in the snow, and summer among the winter ice ? Speak out—be just ; and the heart will say, whenever there has been any real experience,—The Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ has covered most of my life, most has healed my diseases, has spoken to me a larger language than I ever heard before—“God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The rebels were overthrown and a marvellous providence asserts itself immediately in connection with the overthrow :

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up the censers out of the burning, and scatter thou the fire yonder ; for they are hallowed. The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar : for they offered them before the Lord, therefore they are hallowed : and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel ” (xvi. 36-38).

So Christianity uses the weapons of its opponents : as David uses the sword of Goliath ; so that which has been consecrated unto the Lord, even by men whose spirit and temper were not divine, must be claimed for the service of the altar. The altar was made of wood, yet it was covered with metal that the continual burning upon it might not injure the structure ; and now “the censers of these sinners against their own souls,” shall be

made into "broad plates for a covering of the altar."—Behold the Cross—what changes it is undergoing in outward appearance! What are these things which men are nailing to it now? Swords taken in war, trophies brought from the battlefield, crowns once erected in ignoble pride against the supremacy of Christ. So the process goes on. What a Cross it is! What a spectacle!—nailed to it every weapon that has ever been raised against it; and in the very upbuilding of the Cross through the generations we shall read a history which no pen could ever fully write. Shall we join this process of nailing to the Cross that which we have used against it? We have used our little genius—let us go and nail it to the Cross. We have opened our mouth in rude eloquence in many a charge and objection against the Cross—let us give our remaining breath to the praise of him who has never looked upon us but with upbraiding or hopeful gaze. We have fooled away our money in helping those to propagate their views whose object was to turn all earth into a flat plane confined within the four corners of a definite boundary, and to shut out the blue heavens, or to use them merely for the sake of convenience—let us take what remains and say,—Thou wounded Lamb of God, we know thou canst pardon sin, but canst thou forgive folly?—we know not the measure between the tragedy of thy sacrifice and the turpitude of our guilt, but we are not only sinners: we are fools—oh canst thou, Son of God, pity the fool as well as forgive the criminal?—we thought to fight against thee: we meant to win: we accepted the challenge, and now there is nothing left of our rebellious selves but our censers,—Galilean, thou hast conquered!

Let us then accept our places in the divine providence; let us acknowledge a divine order in social relations; do not let us attempt to settle great social questions by the rule of thumb.—Do not imagine that rich and poor can be levelled together all into one plane by some easy democratic method; do let us recognise the presence of a marvellous providence in life. On the other hand, do not let us take such a view of that providence as to lead us to tyrannise over our weaker fellow-creatures; do not let us imagine that we are gods and have a right to override all poor and inferior persons; the true line of wisdom lies between. What hast thou that thou hast not received?—that should be the

question which every man should hear addressed to himself when he is counting his gold and adding fields to his estate and is most conscious of his commanding intellect and his imperial genius. And as for the poor, they should be taught that poverty is no disgrace. There is a rich poverty. There is a noble failure in life; there is a bankruptcy with extenuating circumstances. There are sufferings that have a divine meaning behind them. So we will have no boasting and no despairing. We are free—the rich and the poor, the leader and the follower. “The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice.”

NOTE.

Korah was the leader of the famous rebellion against his cousins Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, for which he paid the penalty of perishing with his followers by an earthquake and flames of fire (Num. xvi. ; xxvi. 9-11). The particular grievance which rankled in the mind of Korah and his company was their exclusion from the office of the priesthood, and their being confined—those among them who were Levites—to the inferior service of the tabernacle, as appears clearly, both from the words of Moses in ver. 9, and from the test resorted to with regard to the censers and the offering of incense. The same thing also appears from the subsequent confirmation of the priesthood to Aaron (ch. xvii.). The appointment of Elizaphan to be the chief of the Kohathites (Num. iii. 30) may have further inflamed his jealousy. Korah's position as leader in this rebellion was evidently the result of his personal character, which was that of a bold, haughty, and ambitious man. This appears from his address to Moses in ver. 3, and especially from his conduct in ver. 19, where both his daring and his influence over the congregation are very apparent. Were it not for this, one would have expected the Gershonites—as the elder branch of the Levites—to have supplied a leader in conjunction with the sons of Reuben, rather than the family of Izhar, who was Amram's younger brother. From some cause which does not clearly appear, the children of Korah were not involved in the destruction of their father, as we are expressly told in Num. xxvi. 11, and as appears from the continuance of the family of the Korahites to the reign at least of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. xx. 19), and probably till the return from the captivity (1 Chr. ix. 19, 31). Perhaps the fissure of the ground which swallowed up the tents of Dathan and Abiram did not extend beyond those of the Reubenites. From ver. 27 it seems clear that Korah himself was not with Dathan and Abiram at the moment. His tent may have been one pitched for himself, in contempt of the orders of Moses, by the side of his fellow-rebels, while his family continued to reside in their proper camp nearer the tabernacle; or it must have been separated by a considerable space from those of Dathan and Abiram. Or, even if Korah's family resided amongst the Reubenites, they may have fled, at Moses's warning, to take refuge in the Kohathite camp, instead of remaining, as the wives and children of Dathan and Abiram did (ver. 27). Korah himself was doubtless with the two hundred and fifty men who bare censers nearer the tabernacle (ver. 19), and perished with them by the “fire from Jehovah” which accompanied the earthquake.—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art our Father. God is love. We live in God; without God we cannot live. Thou hast made us, and not we ourselves. The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord. Thou hast given unto us a time of birth and a time of death, and no hand can alter the record. We stand in God's eternity. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people. Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our Father; the very hairs of our head are all numbered. Behold, in what a way hast thou led us these many years in the wilderness! When there was no water, thou didst find streams in the rocks; when the pool was bitter, the healing tree was nigh; when thou didst send upon us a great judgment, in the whirlwind we heard a tone of mercy. In wrath thou dost remember mercy; in judgment thou art compassionate. The mercy of the Lord endureth for ever; and this will we say with the passion of great love. The way of man is not in himself. The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away, and the Lord's way is always right. Even so, Father: for so it seemeth good in thy sight—would we say in every event of time, how much soever we may be disappointed, and how heavy soever may be the burden we have to bear. This is the time of endurance; this is not the season of explanation. What we know not now we shall know hereafter, and thy answer shall be greater than our question, and where we were much pained we shall be mightily delivered and glorified from on high. Thou art the Father of our life. We are thine, not our own. If we have aught that is our own, it was thine first and will be thine last, for we ourselves are bought with a price. Make us tender, loving, sympathetic, always living in others and for others; and watch over us with Christly solicitude, even though it become aggravated into pain of mind and sorrow of soul because of ingratitude and because of rebellion. May our love be measured by the divine love, and not be changeable, fickle, and uncertain; may it be a great love, originating in the Cross, sustained by daily grace, made larger and more intelligent by the constant inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Bless the orphan, the sad, the lonely, the friendless. Why these miseries should come upon us we cannot wholly tell in words, though there is a voice in our heart which tells us that the way of the Lord is right. Where thou hast given heavy burdens, thou wilt give needful strength; where the tears are many and hot, thy hand will be present in its gentleness. The Lord succour those who need continual help; be a light to the blind, a staff to the weak, a Guide to the perplexed, and the Saviour of all. We commend to thee the children who have no earthly father, those whose homes have been desolated by sudden death, or other invasion of distress. Thou dost anticipate our prayer: and, behold, the infinite answer

of thy pity is uttered upon the earth before our prayer is heard in heaven. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Son of man, Son of God, God the Son, who loved us and gave himself for us, and who, being our Saviour and Priest, is not ashamed to be called our Brother. Amen.

Numbers xx. 14-21.

14. And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the King of Edom, Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travel that hath befallen us :

15. How our fathers went down into Egypt, and we have dwelt in Egypt a long time ; and the Egyptians vexed us, and our fathers :

16. And when we cried unto the Lord, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt : and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border :

17. Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country : we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells : we will go by the king's high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders.

18. And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword.

19. And the children of Israel said unto him, We will go by the high way : and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it : I will only, without doing anything else, go through on my feet,

20. And he said, Thou shalt not go through. And Edom came out against him with much people, and with a strong hand.

21. Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border : wherefore Israel turned away from him.

UNEXPECTED RETRIBUTION.

ALL these things have an explanation. The judgment of things does not lie upon the bare surface, nor is our life a quantity constituted between four visible and measurable points. Life is a mystery—sometimes distant, shapeless and measureless as a cloud, and sometimes a veil so thin we can almost see through it, yet when we touch it, it is a hard wall built by hands invisible, and rising up with darkening height to the very clouds from which we expected revelations of morning and summer. Why do we whine and complain, and say we are ill-used and Edom is unkind and ungenerous, wanting in hospitality, and in all the tenderest attributes of human nature ? It is an ill speech ; it is as wanting in honesty and self-recognition as it is in sound reasoning. Israel was not the poor little innocent wanderer

that it appeared to be from the plaintive, suppliant speech of Moses. Nothing is self-contained. We must go into yesterday to find the explanation of to-day. To-day!—What is it? An up-gathering and sharp, yet transient, representation of things that happened in the centuries dead but never forgotten and never inoperative. Who pleads? Israel. To whom is the plea addressed? To a brother. How did the word *brother* come into the narrative? It came historically. We have here Jacob and Esau. Edom is the name by which Esau was known. Wherever we find the term Edom, our minds may instantly associate with it the history of Esau, and an action of divine sovereignty in relation to that history. Jacob supplanted Esau, ran away in the night time, met his brother at some distance of time afterwards, the brothers fell upon one another's necks, kissed each other, and seemed to sink the infinite outrage in grateful and perpetual oblivion. Nothing of the kind. Life cannot be managed thus; things do not lie between man and man only. Herein is the difference between crime and sin. Crime may be an affair open, visible, measurable, to which adequate penalty may be measured out; but sin hurts the heavens, insults and stains the sceptre of the universe—pains the heart of God. Can men shake hands over it, sponge it out by some act of transient generosity, and say,—Let it be forgotten, as though it had never been? We cannot treat our own sin. The answer to the sin of men must come from the God against whom the sin was committed. Do not let us imagine that sin is a breach of etiquette, a perversion of social custom, an eccentricity of personal taste, a mere outrage of a conventional kind. If we talk thus flippantly and superficially about sin, we shall be astounded when we behold the Cross that was erected for its obliteration and pardon. We must know the sinfulness of sin before we can know the compassionateness of mercy. So Jacob and Esau come face to face throughout the ages. The supplanter cannot sponge out his miserable cunning and selfish deceit and unpardonable fraud. Jacob the individual dies, Esau the individual dies: but Jacob and Esau, as representing a great controversy, can never die: to the end of the chapter Edom will encounter Israel with deep and lasting animosity. We cannot always explain the animosities which burn in our excited hearts;

examined and cross-examined as to their history, we may be quite unable to give any exact account of genesis and growth and culmination. Man cannot explain himself to himself; he only knows that inexplicably he feels an animosity which cataracts cannot quench—a burning, blazing scorn which seas cannot drown. There is a mystery in human development. Things are larger than they seem to be. Awkward, perplexing, distressing, is the fact we are bound to recognise, that we come up against ourselves day by day, and our ghostly history follows us from wedding to burial, from feast to battle, from day to night; and when we would be gladdest it thrusts in its sting the furthest. Let us take care of this life. The day is more than twelve hours long; invisible threadlets pass through the dark night and connect themselves with the next day.—Our life is not a thread like a line; it is a web moving in various directions, and thickening itself into substance not always easy to handle, and sometimes wrapping itself round us like a robe that burns off our skin, and sometimes lifting itself above us to shut out the fire and blessing of the sun. Fools are they who live from hand to mouth,—yea, fools inexplicable and unpardonable and wholly undesirable as to companionship, who live a flippant life, thinking that things are in no wise related, and forgetting that to-morrow brings the harvest of to-day.

Influence is not limited by personal action. What is a “person”? There is no such thing, in any narrow and limited sense of the term. A man stands up and says,—Am I not a man?—; and I say,—No, you are not—; there need not be any long and wordy discussion about that. What is an “individual”? There is no such thing, in the sense of a quantity that can be measured, weighed, and set down in exact figures, and as having no relation whatever to anything past or to come. When the little child stands up, generations beat in his pulse. When a man asks if he is not a “person,” an “individual,” he forgets that all his forefathers gather up mysterious influences in his breathing, his attitude, and his action. We are more than we appear to be. We do not bury the past and shut it out as an operative factor in the daily ministry of being. This makes life solemn even to awfulness. When the young life coughs and heaves under the influence of internal pain, what is it that happens?

Whole generations of weakness gather up in that sense of distress and powerlessness. When a young and apparently lovely character suddenly deflects from the straight line and goes away into forbidden places, what has happened? Generations of criminals have asserted their ascendancy over the individual will, and the wanderer may have run off to meet in invisible council more than two or three generations of men.

Jacob must meet Esau again and again. There is no easy escape for wrong-doers. The eternal distrust which subsists between man and man, family and family, race and race, has a moral explanation. It is not all whim, fickleness, mere passion and selfish excitement. We must be philosophical in our quest for causes and motives. Far back in time almost immeasurable we shall find the seed was sown which comes up in unexpected places. The children must suffer for the fathers. We cannot help it. We would complain of it were there not a supplemental and completing truth: for as certainly as the children suffer for their fathers, are they benefited by their fathers' nobleness and beneficence—as certainly do they come to reap golden harvests because of the good seed sowed by the generations that are gone. The way of the Lord is equal. We perhaps cannot understand why we are not allowed to pass through this land, to have right of passage down this country, to navigate certain rivers, and to cross particular provinces; and we take offence: our sensibilities are easily wounded; we say,—This is hard. But you cannot set aside the “divinity that shapes our ends”—the Providence that looks now and again upon us with a face of solemn judgment and transfixes us with a look full of spiritual accusation. What then? Instead of complaining and moaning and reproaching other people, let us search into the reality of the case, and we shall find, perhaps to our surprise—and our surprise may be turned to our instruction,—that whatever occurs to us in the way of disappointment, humiliation, and subordination, is explained by sin done long ago. Is there any consolation in that explanation of the mystery? None; but there is what is better. Why do you always seek for consolation and soothing? Who are we that we should cry out in moaning terms for perpetual consolation? Stand up and say,—This is God's law, and by it we will work; we suffer hurt, damage, loss,

because of what went before us ; we cannot remedy that, but, by the help of God, we will see that our posterity shall reap sweetness where we have gathered only bitterness. The lesson is before you ; the application relates to those who are coming afterwards. We can make their burdens lighter ; we can already open gates through kingdoms for men who are coming fifty and a hundred years and more after this very day ; and as the gates fly open, and hospitality is offered in the time of their wandering, they will remember that this day good men sowed good seed, mighty men fought battles with Heaven, great suppliants won great answers which *they* will enjoy in the fulness of their noble fruition.

So Esau had his turn. We pitied the hairy man as he was driven away portionless, without a blessing, his great big heart full of sin no doubt, quivering with agony, for which there was no adequate expression in words ; but in so far as he has been wronged he will see satisfaction and himself be satisfied. The supplanted family had a land when the supplanter's descendants had only a wilderness. This is the law of Providence. Events are not measured within the compasses of the little day. The cunning man or the strong man, the oppressor or the wrong-doer, may have his victory to-day, and may smile upon it, and regard it with complacency, and receive the incense of adulation from persons who only see between sunrise and sundown. But the heavens are against him ; he has to encounter the eternities, long time after his victory shall wither, and in his descendants his humiliation shall be consummated. Suppose, however, that he should not care for his descendants ? Then he is not a man to be trusted now. Have no companionship with him. Do not put your hand into his hand, for he will wrong you and you will come out of the grasp with a stain upon your palm. Do not laugh with the fool when he says that he cares not for his descendants. A man who does not care for his descendants, cannot care for you, cannot care for his contemporaries ; he writes his own condemnation in his flippant neglect. My son, have nothing to do with such a man ; he will take thee into dark places, strip thee, wrong thee, and to suit his purpose may kill thee. Is it not wonderful how the wheel goes round ? "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto

wrath : for it is written, Vengeance is mine ; I will repay, saith the Lord." Events translate themselves into punishment swiftly and suddenly. A shut gate means you are historically connected with a great wrong. Israel adopts the affectionate style of entreaty and says "thy brother Israel." But wrongs are not thus to be obliterated ; complimentary speeches do not restore inheritances that have been turned away ; eulogiums cannot repossess men of the blessings forfeited by the fraud of others. Live the larger life, the nobler life. Ye are not yourselves : you represent others, and you prepare for others to represent you ; and he only handles life wisely who takes hold of both its ends and who remembers the law of cause and effect, seedtime and harvest, action and influence.

Here is the wrong-doer brought to his knees. That always happens. The wicked man has a short day. The deceiver must face his own deceits. Nothing prospers long in the bad man's hands. The money which he gets wrongfully he cannot spend to his own satisfaction : it is gone whilst he counts it ; it vanishes as he admires it ; there is no stay in the gold, no abiding in the substance ; it is money put into bags with holes in them. If a bad man could succeed, in the large, deep vital sense of the term, he would by so much dethrone God. He cannot, therefore, succeed ; with Heaven against him, with eternity against him, with God against him, when he apparently succeeds, it is but the flash of a little flame that dies in the effort which it makes.

Notice what is termed the solidarity of human life. The human family is one. If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it. The wrongs that were done ten generations ago are being re-asserted as to their moral claim to-day. The controversies of the world are not controversies which began this morning—fights that surprise the combatants ; their beginnings lie far back in the gone centuries, and in proportion to the distances from which they come may be the judgment which they will demand.

We live, then, in a scheme of Providence. Life is not atheistic. Our sufferings have an explanation ; our weakness is not an accident, but the outcome of a series of processes often lying

beyond the line of imagination. The lesson is that we should accept life solemnly, pass through all its processes circumspectly, do nothing at our own bidding or for the gratification of our own will or fancy, but should always say,—My God, thy will be done. Let no man undertake to be God for himself; let him occupy his definite position as servant, errand-bearer, worker in the vineyard, and let his spirit express itself substantially thus: Lord, at thy bidding I would go, at thy bidding I would stay; give me understanding of my time; give me the noble Christly heart, and inspire me by thy Holy Spirit that I may be enabled so to succeed as to ripen into a harvest of satisfaction and gladness in the coming days. No man can live in that spirit without being in heaven as to all the substance and quality of heaven's meaning. That is what is meant by praying without ceasing—namely, living in the prayerful spirit, always being in touch with God, ever having God's throne in view, God's law at heart, God's will the inspiration and direction of life.

Viewed from this altitude, what is sorrow? what is loss? what is disappointment? All these things may be sanctified: orphanage may come to have a special sanctity; loneliness may be surprised into fellowship by visitants bearing no earthly name; and difficulty in living may become the inspiration and enlargement of noble prayer. If we live within the day, if history be nothing but a series of unrelated anecdotes, if seed-time has no reference to harvest,—then the joy of life is dead, the inspiration of labour has ceased, hope no longer plays its heavenly part in the movement of life and in all the gladness of being. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Clever Jacob, designing Jacob, supplanter of the absent brother, stealer of blessings, will one day have to knock at that brother's gate and say,—If it please thee, my lord, may I be permitted to hasten through thy land?—and believe me I will touch nothing. Touch nothing! thou thief of the ages, thou simulator of honesty,—nay, thou wilt touch nothing! How the thief can prate of honesty! How the designing supplanter can say he will "go by the king's high way," and no vine will he touch, and not a drop of water will he drink!

We may have acquired such a reputation that people will not believe us even when we intend to be good for a moment. We may sin away our social standing ; we may so act towards men that when we go before them, as it were, on bended knees and say we will touch nothing, hurt nothing, drink no water out of the wells but hasten through, they will laugh at us and say,—Mocker ! liar ! thief ! remember the past, and then ask if we can be foolish and trustful enough to believe thee. Take care of your character, take care of your soul's honesty ; one day it will open gates, which will secure the hospitality of princes ; and they who serve the Lord—mightily labour for him, and put their whole trust in him, shall go through by the king's highway, and be permitted to eat of the vineyards and drink of the wells, and the longer they stay the more welcome will they be. Let me live the life of the righteous, let me die the death of the righteous, let me cast in my lot with the true and the wise and the divine—I would live and move and have my being in God,

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, in wrath thou dost remember mercy. What are thy judgments but calls upon the compassion of thy people? By thy threatening thou dost bring forth men who will pray. Behold, when thy judgments are abroad in the earth, men take censers and fill them, and pray more mightily unto God than before. Such is thy wondrous way. We, who will not pray in calm time when no wind is abroad shaking the forest, fall to and pray most vehemently when the tempest shakes the heavens and the earth seems to tremble. We, who will not wait upon thee at the altar or care for thy sanctuary in any way when all things flow serenely around us, hasten to the Lord's temple when the air is tainted with death. Thou wilt lay hold upon us either here or there, in this way or in that: but surely thine hand shall find us, and we must face the living God. Thou hast given us a Gospel which is a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. We cannot escape it or deny it: behold, we must account with it; it is the Lord's voice, it is the testimony divine, and we have to make some answer to its great cry of pity and offer of redemption. Thou dost take away the preacher: but the Gospel remains; thou dost change the congregation: but the sanctuary abides for ever; other hands pile the altar fire: but the altar itself is of thy founding and cannot be removed: it is the Lord's appointed meeting-place; there his name is recorded and there his glory shines. Enable us to remember how little we are. We are but the creatures of yesterday and the victims of to-morrow, with a little time of tumult and anxiety between; and instead of attempting to solve the great mysteries of being—to set up an answer to the awful problems of the universe,—may we learn to pray, to love, to cry in penitential cries over our sin, and to hope in the living God, and thus may we be enabled to leave all mystery and great wonder and miracle of thought to be revealed and solved in the eternal world. Meanwhile, make us industrious in all things practical; give us a heart to feel for human want, a hand willing to help all human weakness; heighten our reverence for things divine; put into our voices the tone of noble solemnity; work in us the spirit of resignation; turn our eyes away from all saviours and redeemers but One; and, fixing our vision upon the central Cross, may we behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, and give ourselves to him, asking him to have mercy upon us and apply to us all the virtue of his priesthood. Prepare us for all events. We never know what shall be on the morrow: we will rest in God and trust in truth, and make a sanctuary of the divine righteousness, and would have God find for us a hole in the side of the rock in which we may stand in perfect security until all calamities be overpast. Amen.

Numbers xx. 29.

"And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel."

CONNECTING LINKS.

WE have seen the earth open and swallow up the rebels ; now we may expect to have peace. A great judgment has fallen upon Israel, and from this time there will be no more murmuring and complaining. An earthquake will settle everything. If one could rise from the dead and visit the living, one sight of the dead man would cause the mind to think, the heart to dissolve in tears, and the whole will to consecrate itself to perpetual obedience. We have often invented methods of evangelising the world. Were an angel to stand in the very centre of the mid-day sky so that every one upon the earth could see him, and were he to preach some brief sermon to the sons of men, all the populations upon the face of the globe would instantly hail Jesus Christ, Son of man, Son of God, Saviour of the world. If during some great outrage or crime of nations the earth were suddenly to tremble, shaking down tower and temple here and there, as if about to shake down all cities, men would begin to think, and repent, and pray, and believe. How long shall we forget that history is full of miracles and wonders and signs intended to convey moral instruction to the nations and to bring the peoples to sobriety of mind and religiousness of purpose ? All these inventions which we suppose ought to accompany a divine administration of affairs have been tried and they have all failed. The earthquake is useless, and the great flood, the drowning deluge, and the storm of fire and brimstone ;—these things are exploded as arguments for the purpose of pointing in the direction of the right method of converting the world. An instance in point is now before us (Numbers xvi. 41). "But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord." When did this murmuring occur ? The very day that the divine judgment was inflicted. Earthquakes have no abiding moral ; great

physical demonstrations seem to perish in the using. An earthquake becomes a familiarity; a plague becomes a topic of common gossip; darkening heavens and shooting lightnings are remarked upon by the people who pass under the tempestuous canopy. The world is not to be sobered as we thought—to be steadied and brought into prayerful mood and temper; it is not by miracle, nor by earthquake, nor by fire, but by some other way subtler, farther off, apparently less effectual, and a method requiring long time to develop itself and apply itself to the whole line of human action and human need. It would be difficult to believe all this if we could not corroborate it by our own experience. When was the great sin committed in your case? “On the morrow” after the judgment. Can men sin so suddenly and immediately after the divine chastisement for wrong-doing? As an argument we should say, No, they cannot do so; but we are forced back upon facts, realities, solid and personal experiences, and all these combine to say: Hardly will the night pass to separate men from the great judgment before they are back at the forbidden altar, drinking the forbidden cup, and lifting up their hand in obstinate challenge to Heaven. It is so everywhere. Men see the evil results of wrong courses of behaviour, and they repeat those wrong courses as soon as their energy is recruited; men feel the ill effects of wrong living, and they will repeat that wrong living to-morrow. Daily we see what comes of evil practice, ignoble purpose, unholy thought, and yet we no sooner look at the punishment than we go away to do the very thing which involved the judgment of God. Account for this. There is no accounting for it argumentatively. If this were a mere matter of words, it could only be settled in one way. Were it possible for any human fancy so to forget all the history of the world as to stand up and say what men would do under such and such circumstances, detailing the very facts of life as we ourselves know them, we should resent the suggestion, we should declare it an exaggeration, an expression of an absurd impossibility. The witness is in ourselves: our conscience condemns us. Why is it important to dwell upon this? To show that human nature is one, to show that the Bible deals with one kind of humanity, and that one kind of humanity is found in all lands, in all ages: it never

changes ; and it is important also as aggravating a condition to which some reply must be made from Heaven. We mass ourselves up into one terrific solid, and God must find some answer to the tremendous consolidation which we present. He must answer it with judgment, or he must answer it with mercy. The answer must come from above, be it what it may ; and it can only be one of two answers : destruction—salvation ; anger—pity ; an assertion of sovereign and majestic power, or a condescension of divine majesty to the low condition and awful apostasy of human nature. Reading the Bible through thus, page by page, steadily and patiently, one may come upon the Cross with a feeling which would be utterly impossible under any other conditions of Biblical perusal. The Lord is angry with the people ; he says he will destroy them after all : he will send a plague upon the camp which shall utterly burn it up. Is the Lord not sometimes tempted to fight us with our own weapons ? Is not the divine patience apparently exhausted ? Does it not seem as if only in one way can God get hold of us, and that by the way of destruction ? So often is his hand lifted up and so often does it fall without inflicting the penalty. This is a holy vacillation ; this is a glorious hesitancy. Looking at history we say,—Now the arm will fall and nothing can prevent it ;—and suddenly as by a breath—soft as the breath of prayer—that great arm is turned aside, and the blow is not struck. This is divinity. It would be fickleness but in God ; it would be an incertitude of mind but in the Most High. God knows that the way of salvation is the best way,—not the readiest, not the directest—destruction always lies handiest to the law that has been outraged ;—but salvation may be so conceived, wrought out, and applied as to vindicate itself in the long run. Any time in relation to eternity must be a quantity infinitesimal. We store up our millenniums and call them long periods ; we pile one thousand years upon another thousand years and multiply the double thousand by ten until our poor imaginations stagger under the vastness of the result ; but the accumulated millenniums are but the flicker of a pulse, coming, going, dying, in the twinkling of an eye, compared with the duration of the divine throne. It will be seen, therefore, in Heaven's by-and-by, that the method of salvation, though ap-

parently so indirect and so remote in its influence and effect, is a divine method—the only method, the method that alone can vindicate itself by its sublimest issues.

So Moses and Aaron turned aside the divine wrath, and the Lord took to another course. He said,—This matter of rulership and guidance must be settled once for all. If the tone of impatience could enter the divine voice, it would be under such daily and vexatious provocation. So he will appeal to the eyes of the people; he would have the rods laid up, according to the statement in the seventeenth chapter,—he would have every one of them take a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers: twelve rods; and every man's name was to be written upon his rod, and the man whose rod budded was to have the rulership and the primacy of Israel. So God will become an infant to us, because we are infants. This is the great method of human education. The philosopher has to become a child if he would teach a child; the mother can only charm the baby as she herself becomes a baby; God can only help man as he becomes a man. Great is the mystery of godliness, because always great is the mystery of love. Great is the mystery of condescension—infinite is the miracle of stooping to the lowest condition. Now Israel shall see a sight,—it is the stoop of God. The rods were laid up, in due time they were examined, and there was one rod budding and blooming like a living thing, and nor bud nor blossom could be seen upon the other rods. Whose rod budded and blossomed? It was Aaron's rod. Henceforth it was to be a sign of power and divine election, and the sight of that rod was to settle all conflict, all controversy. Did that succeed? Nothing can succeed that is outward, visible, typical, or even miraculous. The miracles have all been tried, and they have all failed. Christ laid them down as useless tools. He knew from the beginning that they were useless; but he must adapt his plans to the condition of the scholars who are supposedly attending his school. So he leads us to drop miracle and sign and wonder and judgment, and causes us to cry out,—What then is the strength of God? what is the method of Heaven? and when our judgment and imagination have been purged of false conclusions and vain imaginings, then he says—and he could

have said it at no earlier period, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." To have said so at the beginning, would have been to puzzle the human mind, and distract the human imagination. First of all man must be cleared of the sophism that judgment can work wonders, that rising from the dead can convert families and nations. The miracle delusion must be destroyed. Yet the purpose of the miracle remains; when the mere miracle drops off, the spirit which animated it abides for ever—a spirit of compassion, condescension, gracious and tender appeal to men, willing in any way, if by any means the human heart can be touched with religious and ennobling emotion. This miracle in its great moral purpose is still wrought amongst us. The Bible is the rod that buds. We have laid up all other books along with it: we have given them plenty of time together, and now when we open the place where they were put together, we find that only one Book has upon it bud and blossom, and sign of satisfying fruit. Our appeal is to facts. Many books have arisen to dispute the supremacy of the Bible; many plans have been invented for overturning Christ's method of saving the world; the mocker has laughed, the vain imagination has invented its fancies, and the troubled conscience has wrought miracles in casuistry and in the base use of language with double and triple meanings, and men have invented noises for the purpose of destroying spiritual and moral voices and appeals; but after all the experiments there is one rod that buds, one Book that blossoms, one tree whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. We must, therefore, go through miracles to facts, through spaces which daze the mind by their mystery or their vastness, to the simple realities of life; and the Bible this day and every day calls men to any Carmel they may choose, and on the height of the solemn hill it will settle the controversy by appealing to the influence exerted upon human life, to mastery of human affairs, and to the power of giving solace under all the exacerbations and infinite distresses of human life.

Now the history passes on, and we find, presently, that the little company of leaders becomes less. In the twentieth chapter and the first verse we have one line which says,—“And Miriam died

there, and was buried there." You could scarcely say less about a dog! She began bravely and musically did this woman, but she was full of thought; she inspired her feeble brother Aaron that they might together challenge the pontificate of Moses. She began with timbrel and dance, with a thrilling soprano; she was first among those who sang the Song of Deliverance, and we thought then she would do well; but hers was a poor course—a bright promise that never came to any solid effect. She murmured against Moses, she found fault with his marriage, she disputed his supremacy, she inspired the most fickle and feeblest of all great men, namely, Aaron her brother, that he might take share in the cowardly attack upon Moses; and now history—solemn, impartial, awful history—avenges the cause of righteousness and gives Miriam but one line:—"Miriam died there, and was buried there." We may so live as to be so characterised ourselves. It is possible for us so to live that nobody may miss us when we die. Of course we must have a grave: the earth must be scarred in some few inches to let us into its impartial bosom; but it is poor work; and there lies here a man over whose grave no child ever wept, over whose resting-place no heart ever beat with unusual quickness as if stirred by grateful emotion; here lies a man who took up room that a better man might have occupied, and he is thrust in here without any memorial. It is possible to live so. There is a happier possibility: we may live so that our grave shall be a sacred spot, a kind of altar inscribed to the honour of the mercy and goodness of the living God, so that men passing it may say, He was a brave soul; he had a noble heart; no suspicious thought ever vitiated that man's thinking; no mean desire or purpose ever warped and depraved his career, in relation to the cause of weakness and poverty and pain. Such men cannot die, except in the narrowest sense of that term; when they are laid away they seem to be more with us than ever. We multiply our dead: we magnify our good ones; we create a little heaven in our own imagination and heart, and we remember little words, quiet tones, and gentle touches, subtle references, and sum up all these things into the judgment of goodness, and the record of gratitude. That the sweet singer—that the sister of Moses—that a woman with the spirit of leadership in her, should simply

have "died" and been "buried" is a lesson to us. How are the mighty fallen! how have the sons of the morning lost their light!

Was Moses, then, perfect? The two brothers are left alone now,—was Moses a perfect man? Let us thank God that he was not. The perfect man is a most discouraging influence in any community. He repels rather than attracts, being simply a man and perfect as such, first because perfection is impossible, secondly because its appearance, assumption, or attainment, discourages men who feel that they cannot advance with its pace or attain to its pre-eminence. So Moses falters; Moses will become in some degree one of us. When the people murmured for want of water, the Lord said,—Go forward; show them the rod, and quiet their murmurings. But this was never done. Moses went forward, and in a moment of rage or impatience—not to be wondered at—he struck the rock; and because of that stroke God struck him. We must not do things in our own way; we must show the rod, not strike with the rod. By such fine distinctions are men judged. The difference between men is not the difference between black and white—great broad issues,—but often becomes a distinction between full obedience and partial obedience, continual sacrifice and occasional sacrifice; a difference of tone—too loud, too low; too emphatic, too hesitant. So critical—so minute—is the vision and the judgment of God.

Then we come to the time when Moses was left alone.

"And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel" (xx. 29).

They took the nobler view of the man. After all he was God's priest. We must have some regard to the men who have thrown even the censer of the sanctuary. He was sometimes feeble to contemptibleness, sometimes perhaps a little vain, though he would not have been half so vain but for the prompting of his ambitious sister; he made the calf of gold, he did things which he ought not to have done; still for him the ephod was made, on him the sacerdotal robes were set as by the very hands of God; he was Aaron after all. So when he died there was a thirty days' mourning for him, "even all the house of Israel." They remembered the old man's best qualities: they said,—

he was always valiant : he seemed—he was—a good man in the soul of him : the rotten places were all outside : the core of the old priest was a sound and healthy core. The people have the spirit of judgment ; the people know the true from the false. There is hardly any bar of judgment out of heaven so exact in its decisions as the bar of the common opinion of the nations. So Aaron was mourned for by all the house of Israel. We shall—said they in effect—see the old man no more ; he had a noble speech : he was the rhetor of the wilderness : he was chosen because of his eloquence : he was to be a mouth unto Moses and Moses was to be as God unto him. So they complemented one another : what the one had the other had not : what the one had not the other had ; they were brothers indeed, and the mourning was touched with a deeper pathos when Israel caught sight of Moses. Miriam gone, Aaron gone—who next can go but the great chief himself ? So wondrously are the events of life related to one another, touched by one another, coloured by one another, and so profound and subtle is the mystery of pathos itself. Who remains ? The Lord abideth for ever—Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. The singing Miriam dies, but the music still flows on ; priestly Aaron passes away, but our Melchizedek abideth a Priest for ever ; the great Moses dies with the only pomp possible to the majesty of his career—in the solitude of the divine companionship, but the God of Moses lives. This must be our confidence in the day of fear, when we ask,—What shall Israel do when Miriam ceases to sing, when Aaron ceases to pray, when Moses ceases to lead ? What shall be done when the prophets drop their mantle and the fathers say Adieu ? Our confidence must be in God : his heaven is full of angels, his ministers are without number in their host, and never yet sang human voice, never yet resounded human eloquence, never yet went forth the champion of human liberties, whose place God could not supply with an ampler abundance. There is no searching of his understanding. The Church does not stand in the song of its singers, in the eloquence of its preachers, in the prayers of its priests ; the Church stands in Christ. When he dies, the Church dies. He abideth for ever ; the Church is, therefore, assured as to its duration by the eternity of its Lord.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou dost lead us by the right way. Its length is determined, and all the influences which operate upon it are under thy control. We did not begin the way, nor do we know one turning that is upon it, nor can we determine the length thereof. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps; the way of man is from the Lord which made heaven and earth, and he will sustain the traveller, he will bring the weary pilgrim to the heavenly rest. Thou hast led us these many years in the wilderness, and thou hast made a garden of the desert, and thou hast found for us orchards amongst the rocks; thy course towards us has been a daily miracle, a surprise of love, a new revelation of light. So now we begin to see somewhat of God's meaning in what to us has been so long confusion and bewilderment. Thou dost work secretly, so that we cannot see thee; thine hand is not always visible to us so that we can say,—This is the Lord, and this is his work, and, behold, he doeth it in his own way and time. We cannot see much; we can hear but a little; we must, therefore, live our larger life—the life of faith, the noble, eternal life of trust in the living God; saying daily, until our very voice becomes musical by the exercise,—The will of the Lord be done: it is best; thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. When we can speak this prayer with our hearts, we shall know that the pinnacle is being put upon the temple, that the topstone is being set upon the tower, and that our life's education upon earth is nearly completed. Do thou take us, by thine own way, to the city which hath habitations built for the sons of men. We think we see the shorter road; but our life is full of mistakes of our own making: so we will judge nothing before the time, but wait in the spirit of trust and in the meekness of patience. We will leave all the way to God. We will not take our life-course from our passion, our imagination, our selfishness; we will have nothing to do with it, except in God and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Then our thirst shall be a blessing, our hunger shall be a means of grace, our difficulties shall be elements of delight, and the strain that is put upon our weakness shall be the beginning and the assurance of power. Bring us into the inner places of God's house; take us from chamber to chamber until we see the innermost centre possible to earthly vision; give us to feel the warmth of the sanctuary—its tender, hospitable glow; give us to feel assurance of God's nearness and God's love and God's almightiness to save. Protect us from impression made through the senses only, and undertake for us that we shall learn wholly from thy Spirit, disregarding appearances which we can neither understand nor control. Enable us to trust thee, and love thee, and serve

thee: and when the enemy's hand is mighty upon us, may the hand of God be mightier still; and when the discouragement of the way is very severe, may our gift in prayer be greatly enlarged, and our souls see an open gate to the throne of the heavenly grace. We bless thee for thy Son Jesus Christ, our Saviour. We love him because he first loved us. Whilst we were yet sinners he died for us, much more now that he is raised and throned in heaven will he mightily succour us by his consolations and ennoble us by his promises. Comfort thy people; say unto them their iniquity is pardoned, and grant unto them assurance that the enemy hath no more power over them, seeing they are bought with a price and are marked by the sign of God and are guided by the Spirit Eternal. We remember our loved ones everywhere, praying for them with all prayer and supplication, that they, with us, may enjoy the common blessings of the sanctuary, and, having happiness of home, may have triumph in the house of God and great success in the market-place; the Lord bless them in basket and in store, in property, in children, in all manner of business and avocation, in travelling by sea and by land; and show us all that there can be no distance from one another, where there is no distance from the common centre; if we love God, we shall be near one another, though mountains intervene and seas roll between us; we touch a common Cross, we look at a common Light, we breathe to the One, the Universal, Father; and in this sweet, noble fellowship we are conscious of living union. Make the sick thy care. In many cases they are quite beyond us; our gentlest touch is roughness, our whispered affection is a loud voice; but thou canst speak to souls nearing heaven, thou canst comfort those whose feet are touching the last cold river, thou canst trim the light when we cannot touch it. So we hand over our sick chambers and all our suffering loved ones to the Physician and Healer of the universe, willing to be his servants that we may work as he bids us, and wait all the time until our patience is completed. The Lord hear us in these things; the Lord send us answers more than we have capacity to receive; the Lord show us that he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think: that in our mightiest prayer we have not begun to touch the infinity of his reply. Amen.

Numbers xxi. 4.

"... much discouraged because of the way."

DISCOURAGEMENTS.

THE people wanted to take a straight course through the land of Edom, and the people of Edom said they should not pass through their provinces—even though Israel promised to "go by the king's high way," and not to enter the vineyards, and not to take a drop of water out of the wells, or if they did take any water to pay for it. But Edom was resolute. The

people, therefore, had "to compass the land of Edom"—to take a roundabout course; and it was so long, so wearisome, so heavy with monotonousness, and altogether so unlike what the other way would have been, that "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way." Discouragement is a kind of middle feeling; it is, therefore, all the more difficult to treat. It does not go so far down as cowardice, and has hardly any relation to a sense of triumph or over-sufficiency of strength; but the point of feeling lies between, deepening rather towards the lower than turning itself sunnily towards the higher. When that feeling takes possession of a man, the man may be easily laid down, thrown over, and may readily become the prey of well-nigh incurable dejection. Discouragement is not far from despair. The feeling, then, is: Let us return,—why did we come out at all?—the short way is the way backward: let us undo the journey and return to the origin whence we started. That is a human feeling; that is the feeling of every man at some point in his education. You take up a new language: you say you will certainly master this tongue. But the way is circuitous. For a little while it is bright enough and easy enough, and we think we might take children with us along a way so broad and sunny; suddenly we come to irregularities, exceptions, endless variations and shadings; we confuse moods with tenses, and tenses with moods; we ask for things we do not want, and we name things by names that are all but comical mistakes;—and we say at this point of our progress,—Let us return to the Egypt of our ignorance: this task is too heavy this penalty is a burden;—would we had never started from Egypt, where we could speak what little language we needed quite fluently and could ask in it for more things than we were ever likely to get! The student is discouraged,—yea, much discouraged because of the way. Let him persevere a month or two, or six, or twelve; let him get beyond the middle point and begin the joy of acquisition, and taste the sweetness of liberty, and know the magic of thinking in another tongue than that in which he was born; and nothing can take him back to the Egypt of ignorance, to the captivity of intellectual darkness. What wonder, then, if in learning a language, or science, or any other complicated lesson, we come to a point of discouragement,

that there should be kindred discouragements in all upward ways? The right way is uphill. It is easy to go downhill: we think we are not tired in going downhill; yet it is most weary work to climb the steep ascents. But the temples are all on the top of the steep; the heavenly cities are away above the valleys. We have, therefore, to consider one of two things: whether we will succumb to an innate indolence that simply wants to be let alone and to be amused or gratified without expense; or whether we will clear the valleys, leave all the lower levels behind us, and go up with ever-increasing vitality and ever-brightening hope, until there comes into the soul a sense of joy which can never permit the soul to go back to the places where the fog thickens, where the damps choke, and where there is nothing broad, grand, eternal. But we have to be very careful with the discouraged soul. When the young student feels his eyes moistening because he cannot subdue the unruly irregulars and exceptions, we must not shout at him or speak to him roughly, but tell him that once we were exactly at that very point, and we cried our eyes out for very vexation that these unruly things would not be set in order and would not do just what we wanted them to do; then the little learner, the young soul, remembering that we fought a battle just there, may take heart again, and come up to-morrow with reinvigorated motive and strength. Power is rightly used when it is employed to sustain and inspire the discouraged; it ceases to be power—it becomes a merely exaggerated strength and an unruly despotism—when it is employed to threaten, to distress, and to grieve the soul that is already too much troubled.

There are necessary discouragements. How awful it would be if some men were never discouraged!—they could not bear themselves, and they could not act a beneficent part towards other people. It is well, therefore, for the strongest man occasionally to be set back half-a-day's travelling and have to begin to-morrow morning at the point where he was yesterday morning. If he could go on with continually enhancing strength, he would become a severe critic of other men, and would himself be turned into the severest discouragement which could be inflicted upon competitors. It is well, therefore, that some supposed baragins should turn out mistakes; it is best that some strokes

that were going to cleave the rock right in two should strike the smiter himself that he may tremble under the force of his own blow. Otherwise, who could live with some men? They would be so outblown, so self-flattered; they would be so conscious of their superiority as to fill the whole street in which they lived and the whole city which they plagued by their presence. It is of God that the strongest man should sometimes have to sit down to take his breath. Seeing such a man tired, even but for one hour, poor weak pilgrims may say,—If he, the man of herculean strength, must pause awhile, it is hardly to be wondered at that we poor weaklings should now and then want to sit down and look round and recover our wasted energy.

We must not forget that a good many discouragements are of a merely physical kind. We do not consider the relation between temperament and religion as we ought to consider it. We are apt to be too abstract and spiritual, and therefore exacting and tyrannous in our judgments of one another. Many a man would have been abreast with the foremost of us to-day but for some physical peculiarity of temperament over which he has no control. His sunny moments are but brief and very few in number; when a ray of light does strike him, he can smile with the merriest and play with the most free-handed; but suddenly the clouds shut, and then he is as blank and cold and fear-driven as ever. We ought to speak gently to such a sufferer. Your inability to pray to a bright heaven arises entirely—if you could see your own physiology—from a little pressure here, and a little congestion there, or some imperfect action yonder; this trouble is not in the soul of you, and it has nothing to do with your standing before God and your citizenship in heaven: it is a physical disturbance, it is a purely temporary affair; and if you can seize that thought, and accept the assurance which it involves, you will pray as gladly into a thick cloud as into a radiant morning, because you will know that the cloud is not in the heavens, it is only a covering before your own disordered vision. These views are needful to a right judgment of life. Sometimes, too, men's physical strength is utterly exhausted, and therefore their intellectual energy and their spiritual vitality may be by so much impaired. The wheel cannot go on for ever. The strongest giant begins to totter, Hercules asks for a staff, and

Samson begs to be allowed to retire awhile, promising to come up as bravely as ever to-morrow, if he can but steep his soul in one short night's oblivion. Consider, therefore, that you are not necessarily unfaithful, disloyal, unworthy, because, for the moment, you have lost your gift of vision, your faculty of prayer, your priestly standing which men have so often recognised as being full of power—the power of prevailing sweetness; your soul has not gone down, your spirit is not impoverished, but the poor flesh gives in; you have been working too many hours: you thought you would make six days almost into seven, and that is a miracle you cannot perform; you have said you would light the lamp and keep it aflame an hour longer than usual; and the lamp got the better of you. In your very soul's soul you are just as good as you ever were, and just as true to God and as anxious to serve him and follow all the way of his finger; but your body is being overworked, and you must stop to get the candlestick repaired, or the candle may drop out of it, and there may be a destructive fire in your premises. Examine yourselves, whether the discouragement comes out of some spiritual fault—some inner secret which no eye can see but your own; or whether it is accidental, physical, and therefore transient. Be rational in your inquiry into the origin of your discouragement, and be a wise man in the treatment of the disease.

There are exaggerated discouragements. Some men have a gift of seeing darkness. They do not know that there are two twilights—the twilight of morning, and the twilight of evening; they have only one twilight, and that is the shady precursor of darkness. We have read of a man who always said there was a lion in the way. He had a wonderful eye for seeing lions. Nobody could persuade him that he did not see a ravenous beast within fifty yards of the field he intended to plough—not there only, but absolutely in the street, so that you do not find him half-way to the field, but peering out of his own side-window and beholding a lion in the very middle of the way. That is an awful condition under which to live the day of human life. But that lion is real to him. Why should we say roughly,—There is no lion,—and treat the man as if he were insane? To him, in his diseased condition of mind, there *is* a lion. We must ply him with reason softly expressed, with sayings without bitterness;

we must perform before him the miracle of going through the very lion he thought was in the way; and thus, by stooping to him and accommodating ourselves to him, without roughness or brusqueness, or tyranny of manner and feeling, must bring him round to the persuasion that he must have been mistaken. We read of a man who would not sow because he had been observing the wind. That man still lives. He is sure the wind is in a cold quarter. It is absurd on your part to attempt to prove to him that it is breathing from the warm south-west;—upon you it may be so breathing, if you like to feel it so; but he says,—I know by my own sensations that the wind is breathing from the north-east, and if I go out the seed will be blown into some other man's field, and my own life will be sacrificed to the cruelty of the wind. So we have men much discouraged by lions that do not exist, by winds that do not blow, by circumstances that are purely imaginary; but we must recognise these facts, and address ourselves to them with the skill of love, as well as with the energy of conviction.

Discouragement does not end in itself. The discouraged man is in a condition to receive any enemy, any temptation, any suggestion that will even for the moment rid him of his intolerable pressure. Through the gate of discouragement the enemy wanders at will. The gate of the mind is not open, the gate of a sacred purpose is not open; every gate of entrance into the mind's inner life is shut but one,—the gate of discouragement swings back and forward and seems to wave a welcome to any thought that will prey upon the mind and to any enemy that chooses to desolate the heart. Therefore be tender with the discouraged, help them to swallow their tears, tell them that you have had kindred experiences with their own, show them how you were led through that gate out of the bondage into the sweet liberty, and say you will stop with them all night. The discouraged man likes to feel himself in the grip of a strong hand. Some men cannot stop up all the night of discouragement by themselves; but if you would sit up with them, if you would trim the light and feed the fire, and say they might rely upon your presence through one whole night at least, they might get an hour's rest, and in the morning bless you with revived energy for your solicitude and attendance. If the prophet had bidden

thee do some great thing, thou wouldest have done it : the prophet bids thee do some little thing, some act of gentlest patience and love, and to do it as if not doing it—to do it as if by gracious necessity, to do it as if conferring an obligation on thyself. Not the thing done but how done, is often the question which must be determined by the doer.

Discouragements try the quality of men. You cannot tell what some men are when their places of business are thronged from morning until night, and when they are spending the whole of their time in receiving money. You might regard them as really very interesting characters ; you might be tempted to think you would like to live with them : they are so radiant, so agreeable, so willing to oblige ; they speak so blithely that you suppose you have fallen upon some descendant of the line of angels. That is quite a mistake on your part. If you could come when business is slack, when there are no clients, customers, patrons, or supporters to be seen, you would not know the lovely angels, you would not recognise the persons whom you thought so delightful. Look at the face, how cloudy ! Hear the voice, how husky ! Observe the action, how impatient ! Mark the eye, how furtive and angry ! Now you see what the man really is. Adversity tries men. We are in reality what we are under pressure. The year is not all summer ; the year has long rains and heavy snows and biting frosts, and the entire year must be taken in if we would make an accurate survey of the whole land. Do not let us deceive ourselves. We have times of a little excitement and triumph and gladness, when people think us kind and amiable and delightful ; but we know we are saying within ourselves,—If these people could only see us at other times when we snap like mad dogs, when nothing pleases us, when feathers are hard, when summer is winter, when our best friends are burdens to us, they would not form such judgments of our delightful qualities. The meaning of all this is that the Christian has to show, whatever other men have to do, that Christianity is a religion for night, and winter, and ill-health, and loss, and discouragement ; a religion that sits up all night, a religion that does not run away when the dogs of war are let loose, but that comforts, and sustains, and animates under deprivations of the severest kind.

What is the cure of this awful disease of discouragement? Men are not to be laughed out of their discouragements as if they were merely illusory, or as if they were assumed for the purpose of affectation. Let us repeat to ourselves again and again, that discouragement is positive and actual to the man who suffers from it. The very first condition of being able to treat discouragement with real efficiency is to show that we know its nature, that we ourselves have wandered through its darkness, and that we have for the sufferer a most manly and tender sympathy. What is the discouragement? Loss in business? We have all lost in business. Ill-health? We have all suffered from ill-health. Bereavement? Where is there a hand that has not dug a grave? Temptations from hell? Who lives that has not felt the devil's hot breath upon his soul? We must be one with the discouraged man. Identification is the secret of sympathy, and sympathy spoken tremblingly that realises the meaning of the apparently contradictory words,—“When I am weak, then am I strong.”

Then are there no encouragements to be recollected in the time of our dejection? Do the clouds really obliterate the stars, or only conceal them? The discouragements can be numbered,—can the encouragements be reckoned—encouragements of a commercial, educational, social, relative kind,—encouragements in the matter of health or spirits or family delights? Is it rough in the market-place? Possibly; but how tranquil is it at home!—and what is any market-place when home is quiet with the peace of heaven? Are there losses and trials? Possibly; but are there no spiritual gains, acquisitions, subtle accretions of moral power, so that a receding earth means an approaching heaven? Do the papers bring you bad news this morning? What about the letters that are lying in your lap—letters from children at school, from children in business, from friends who are giving you thanks for assistance lent years ago? Why, all these letters are like the gathering up of sunbeams. God forbid I should say to you,—Do not write down your discouragements. Take slate enough and pencil enough to put down the whole black list; but God forbid I should forget to say,—Now write on the other side your encouragements, your sources of happiness, your springs of strength, your inspirations, and your hopes; put

them down with a firm hand, and you will have to turn the slate over to accommodate the growing list.

The great cure for discouragement is a persuasion of being right. We have really very little to do with mere circumstances; we are not masters of the weather, we cannot control the atmosphere, nor have we any magical wand by which we can do things which are of a supernatural kind. The eternal consolation is in the fact that the purpose is right, the heart is sound, the suppliant means his prayer, the student grasps the truth;—all other changes are atmospheric, climatic, transitory,—damping enough and discouraging enough in the meanwhile, but forgotten to-morrow. The devil has but a short chain, and he cannot add one link to its length. This is eternal life, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.—The clouds do not throw down the house: the house is founded upon a rock; think of the rock, not of the falling snow; think of the eternal foundation, and not of the changing clouds. “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.”

Then the chief cure, the master remedy, the sovereign assurance, must be found in the example of Christ. *He* was much discouraged because of the way. “He marvelled because of their unbelief;” “he did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief;” but when he was come nigh the city, he wept over it, and said: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen doth gather her young under her wings, and ye would not!” They went out against him with swords and staves as against a thief; but for the joy that was set before him he endured the Cross, despising the shame. It is worth waiting a whole winter night to behold the brightness of the coming summer. A little rain, a high wind, a fall of snow, unexpected frost, a little bitterness in the cup;—these things come and go, but we, being in Christ, seek a kingdom which cannot be moved. If we are seeking nothing, then discouragements will prevail; in the absence of definite purpose, distinct assault will have a tremendous effect upon us; but if our eye be single and our whole body be full of light, and if our vision be set upon a given destiny, and that destiny be a city which hath foundations whose Builder and Maker is God, then apostles will

shake off the viper into the fire, lions will shake the dewdrops from their manes, sleepers will throw back the garments in which they have been slumbering, and brave men will find in the end more than compensation for the way, and one glimpse of heaven will cast into eternal forgetfulness all the little troubles of earth.

NOTE.

Crossing the Arnon, we reach in succession, *Rabbath Moab*, still called *Rabba*, in the midst of a wide plain, where we find more broken cisterns, fallen columns, and ruined heaps, betokening former greatness and importance. Farther on is *Kerak*, the Biblical *Kir-Moab*, or *Kir-hareseth*, on the brow of a hill which juts out from a yet higher range in the form of a peninsula, flanked by stupendous ravines on three sides. It is a position of great strength, as seems intimated by the Scripture references; and it was here that in desperation at the long siege by Jehoram and Jehoshaphat, the King of Moab offered his firstborn son as a sacrifice upon the walls. During the Crusades, *Kerak* became again famous, and the Crusaders' castle still remains. The population of the modern town is between seven and eight thousand, of whom nearly one-third are reckoned as Christians belonging to the Greek Church. Their bishop takes his title from *Petra*, probably because, when the see was founded in the twelfth century, the place was mistaken for the great "rock city" of ancient Edom.

The journey now assumes a new character; and while more desolate and even dangerous, from the bands of roving Bedawin, has a wonderful interest. For, in Bible language, we have passed from Moab to the confines of Edom. The Dead Sea is left behind, on our right is Mount Seir, a range of hills, averaging two thousand feet in height, on this side chiefly of limestone, swelling gradually upwards from the desert, and crowned by ridges of a reddish sandstone, through which crop up masses of basalt. The mountain wall is broken by deep clefts clothed with every variety of herbage, while on every level terrace, and on all the less precipitous slopes, shrubs and flowers luxuriantly grow. "It is indeed the region," remarks Dr. Robinson, "of which Isaac said to his son, 'Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above.'"

On the left hand stretches the wilderness in which the last months of Israel's "wanderings" were passed—the dreary arid waste to which they were driven by the inhospitality of Edom; in which "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way," the wilderness of the fiery serpents, and still the most dreaded part of the pilgrim's road to Mecca. It is not, however, necessary for the traveller to descend into this fearful desert. Strongly escorted, and paying due tribute to the Bedawin tribes along his route, he may pursue his way in safety, on the skirt of the hills, passing through several large villages beautifully placed upon the heights until he reaches *Petra*.—DR. GREEN'S *Pictures from Bible Lands*.

PRAYER

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art always healing men ; thou healest all their diseases. Thou knowest our frame ; thou rememberest that we are but dust. Thou dost not send affliction willingly upon the children of men, nor grieve them for thine own pleasure ; thou dost chasten men for their profit, and thou dost mean affliction to lead to the throne of grace. We would not accept affliction rebelliously, but would endeavour to receive it even thankfully, that, in the long run, we may say,—It was good for me that I was afflicted : before I was afflicted I went astray. Thou dost send punishment upon the evil-doer, and we are called upon to say with our whole heart,—This is a judgment that is righteous. Thou dost pain the wrong-doer ; thou dost baffle the evil-minded man ; thou dost turn to confusion the council of thine enemies. This is the Lord's doing ; in it we find rest, security, and eternal hope. The wicked shall not prevail against thee ; all his bows shall be broken, and his sword shall be turned upon his own heart. The good man shall live before thee because he is good ; the gracious soul shall have more grace, and the praying spirit shall be enriched with great replies. This is thy government, thy purpose, thy way in the hearts of men and among the nations of the earth. We accept it ; we do not only submit to it, but receive it with open hearts, with thankfulness of spirit, knowing that the Lord reigneth and in the end his throne shall be established and there shall be no rebellion. Thou hast set up a great vision for men to gaze upon : thou hast erected the Cross ; upon it we behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world ; we hear thy voice saying,—Look unto him, all ye nations of the earth, and be ye saved : believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved. We look : we behold the amazing scene. We cannot understand the mystery,—we feel its solemnity, we answer its pathos ; but the miracle of the righteousness, and the law, and the mercy, and the divine intervention, we cannot understand. Help us to look steadfastly to the Cross ; enable us to keep our eyes evermore upon the one Saviour of mankind ; may we be found in that posture living, dying, throughout all our days ;—then shall our sin have no power over us, and our guilt shall lead us into deeper acquaintance with the mystery of the love of God. We bless thee for the Cross :—God forbid that we should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We find in it all that the soul needs—an answer to a mystery, help in the time of distress, joy in the night of sorrow, balm for every wound. So do we rejoice in the Cross ; we will not turn away our eyes from it ; it is the Tree of Life, the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations. May all eyes be fixed upon it ; may all hearts be moved to great expectation ; may we know that the Cross is the way to pardon, that the Cross receives the crown, that there can be no peace until

there is forgiveness. May forgiveness be granted unto every one of us according to the measure of our sin—yea, and beyond it, that in the abundance of the pardon we may begin to see that sin is swallowed up. Amen.

Numbers xxi. 5-9.

5. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.

6. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

7. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.

8. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

9. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

MURMURING PUNISHED.

ABOUT the extreme probability of the whole story of the wandering of Israel there can be no doubt. Nothing occurs out of time in the story, nothing out of place; nothing is in false colour or tone. Looking upon the story from a merely literary point of view, there is not one line of improbability discoverable in it. Not a single decade, much less a century, is anticipated in the speech of the people. They are children always, with children's whims, faults, desires, amusements, hopes, fears. It is the story of children overgrown, often too much indulged, not knowing the meaning of the thong of chastisement, and not measuring the process by the end. It is a child's life, shut up within the present day and receiving no glory from the promised land. What was the talk of the children of Israel? It was always about the body—want of food, want of water, fear of death, inconvenience, sudden alarm, and pain of body. It was, therefore, just the talk for the age. There is no soul in it, no immortality, no aspiration after liberties immeasurable as infinity. The whole speech is of the earth, earthy. It never throbs with noble passion; it beats fiercely with the excitement of selfishness, beyond that it never goes into the region of vital and solemn tragedy. Is there any improbability in such a statement? We

cannot conceive the improbability because we ourselves too frequently literally repeat the experience. Examine any specimen of modern talk : let it be written down and set before the eye in plain print, like the story of Israel, and say what better is much of it. It is the talk about the body, the weather, the state of business, the income and the outgoing ; it is a mean speech about balances and counter-balances, and the politics of the day, and who is to be first, and who will win, and who will lose ; the talk is about bullocks in the field, and about balances in the marketplace, and about health at the fireside. Is not much human talk now going on around us about trials and circumstances, want of bread, want of water, want of enlargement of domestic comfort, pining for further fields and larger resources ? Where is the altar ? Where is the harp ? Where is the vision that divides the clouds and pierces beyond them, and sees that this little earth is but a help towards some vaster universe ? We do discover it in our case ;—did we not, shame would be ours more burning than fire, for then the centuries would have been wasted upon us and we should have neglected the plainest revelations of Providence ; but an inquiry into our own methods and experiences, and analysis of our own conversation will show the extreme probability of every line that occurs in the portraiture of the wilderness life of Israel. Where do you find the children of Israel in rapture about the tabernacle ? Where is there any noble speech about it ? Where the wonder that after becomes religion ? Where the solemn amazement that stands next in rank and quality to prayer ? The same question might be asked in modern days. If we were careful to take the lowest view of current life, we might establish an analogous case to-day, but we are bound to take in other elements and circumstances which illuminate and colour and enlarge the spectacle and give it some charm and dignity of divinity ; still there is enough in ourselves and about us to establish beyond all successful disputation the probability of the story as it is written in the Pentateuch.

The children of Israel complained because their soul loathed the light bread, they wanted change of food. We do not complain perhaps along the same line ; but are we quite sure that we have lost the spirit of murmuring, with regard to all the sustenance by which the mysterious human life within us is sustained and

nourished? Let it be granted that we have of bread enough and to spare for the body—abundance, even to luxury, so that we never complain: we are thankful for a loaded table: we bless Providence for an abundant supply of all necessities for the body; but does the speech end there? Is there not one within who requires food and whose hunger must be attended to if death would be averted? Are we all body? Is our little life now dwarfed into the measure of such hunger as can be felt by the flesh? Have we no mind to feed, no soul to nourish, no inner nature to brace and strengthen, to inspire, and to complete in strength and perfectness of moral beauty? If we examine the outer man, he expresses himself in terms of contentment; but what if we subject the inner man to cross-examination? What is the tone of *his* reply? It is pungent with reproach, it is bitter with complaining; it is the utterance of a dissatisfied and morbid spirit. Who is content with the spiritual food which God has been pleased to supply for the nourishment and culture of the soul? Is there no complaining in the Church? Is there no disposition amongst the spiritual children of Israel to rise and say,—We are tired of this food, or of that? Where is the spirit of genuine contentment—heart and soul satisfaction? If the food is solid, partaking of the nature of scriptural exposition, full of instruction, solid in thought, noble in knowledge, ample in intelligence, demanding attention, constraining the soul to take heed or it will miss the luminous point, then do not many fall away saying that during the week they are so vexed by difficulties and so strained in their attention that on the Sabbath day they have no appetite for such solid provision? If it is light, moving, not with fluency only, but with some glibness from point to point, digging nowhere, building nowhere, flying like an uncertain bird in the air; then is there not complaining from the other side of want of solidity, and depth, and rock-like massiveness? If the teaching is historical, going far back to find out the way of God in the ancient time, then is there not a voice which says,—All that is dead and gone; the ages have had their turn,—they have lived, flourished, died,—why exhume the centuries? And if it be of the nature of current criticism, referring to living men, contemporaneous events, the immediate fever and passion of the time, then is there not a voice saying,—All this we can read

during the week ; we can keep abreast with this to-morrow ; on this one brief day called Sabbath day be nobler, grander, deeper, vaster in intellectual reach, and keener in spiritual perception ? Surely an assembly of contentious and unruly guests ! There is nothing right. The host's attention has been stretched to the utmost, and behold the viands are rejected ! How few remember that they need not eat the whole of the viands ! How few remember that a little here and a little there may be enough to satisfy the hunger of the mind ! One line may be a revelation ; one little jewelled sentence may be perfectly sufficient ; one cry to Heaven in opening or concluding prayer may be equivalent to inspiration. The contented soul will always find enough to be contented with ; that soul will say,—This is better than I deserve ; I have not earned this by my own strength or wit or industry ; this prey has been taken for me by the mighty hunter on the mountains of the Lord, and I will bless the Giver in heaven, and I will bless the provider on earth for venison which the soul may relish. The discontented man never can be satisfied do not attempt to please him ; have no connection with or relation to him ; ignore him ; pass by him and turn away. He hinders all growth, he disturbs all serenity, he is a plague in the feast. We must not, therefore, set ourselves against the children of Israel as if we had come to a larger manhood altogether. It is perfectly certain that we have an abundance of food ; we are not confined to the eating of this light bread which caused the soul of Israel to experience a sensation of loathing ; we have enough, we say, and to spare, and there is no complaining about earthly abundance. Stop ! you must not steal even the meanest heaven. What about your soul's food ? What about the mean whine—There is no food for the soul ? What about weariness with the Book ? What about the desire to add some other book to it ? Who would not rather hear some other publication read than the inspired volume ? Who is not best pleased by snatches of verse from some human singer ? Who would not suspend the harp of David to listen to some instrument of modern invention ? Let these inquiries stand in that impersonal form, and let each take up the interrogation and test himself by it ; and may God give sound judgment to all !

Did these people desire knowledge ? Did they ever gather

around their leaders and say,—Give us a brighter revelation from heaven; we feel that we are more than mortal: we are too large for this wilderness; within us there is a voice which says, Give; but let the donation be knowledge, light, revelation? When did they ever utter large prayer, noble desire, and express the kind of discontent which is pleasing to Heaven—that is to say, discontent with present acquisitions, discontent with intellectual darkness, discontent with the prison of earth, longing for the liberty of heaven? When do we hear that expression now? Who cries out for more Bible—a larger reading of the holy volume? Who would be content to read through one whole book of the inspired volume, taking it in its entirety and enjoying the reading as men might enjoy honey brought from the very garden of heaven? Who would not weary were the leader of public worship to read through the whole of the Epistle to the Romans? What man would stand up and say,—Begin again: no music like it; repeat its rolling thunder, its tender persuasion, its triumphant anthem, its connected and culminating reasoning? Judging ourselves by false standards, we have made great progress; but judging ourselves by the standard of the Sanctuary, who stands? There is none righteous, no, not one. When did the children of Israel pray for likeness to God, expressing, in some indirect way, almost jealousy of Moses that he should have seen more of the divine personality, that he should have been nearer than anyone else the very throne of God? Who called upon him to show how this mortal might put on immortality and this corruptible put on incorruption? If it could not be done at that time of day, it can be done now; and the question is still pertinent—Where is the soul that longs for transfiguration, that desires above all things holiness, likeness to God, the exact reproduction of the divine image, and the very brightness of the eternal glory? It is not enough to long for instruction; instruction may be but a load of knowledge. Knowledge is not enough; it may but puff up. Knowledge has to become wisdom, wisdom become inspiration, and inspiration become almost identification with God—a mysterious ascension of the soul, but not beyond the experience which the divine education contemplates.

The people complained. The complaint was heard. When we complain, we complain against God. It is God's universe,

not man's. Man did not make a single blade of grass in all the earth's green crop; man did not light a single jet in all the sky burning with stars. When we complain, therefore, we touch the Head of the house, we lay our finger upon currents which report the pressure to the very Heart of creation. We forget this solemn view of things. We treat life as a mere game of chance; we think it is all of our own handling, or of the handling of other men; whereas written upon the earth and inscribed upon the heaven is this declaration:—"The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." To complain is to be atheistic, to murmur is to throw down the altar, to adopt a reproachful tone regarding the necessary education of life is to challenge divine wisdom. The complaint was punished as complaining must always be. Fretfulness always brings its own biting serpent along with it. Charge what improbability you may upon the particular account of serpents in the text—get rid of them if you can from the historical record,—there remains the fact, that the fretful spirit burns itself, the discontented soul creates its own agony, the mind wanting the sweet spirit of contentment stings itself night and day and writhes continually in great suffering. Discontent never brought joy, peevishness never tranquillised the home-life, fretfulness in the head of the house, or in any member of the house, creates a disagreeable feeling throughout the whole place. Complaint punishes itself. Every complaint has a corresponding serpent, and the serpent bites still. The people complained of the light food—then God sent them fiery serpents. There is always something worse than we have yet experienced. The children of Israel might have thought the bread was the worst fate that could befall them. To be without water, and to be continually living upon manna—surely there was nothing worse? We cannot exhaust the divine resources of a penal kind. There is always some lower depth, always some keener bite, always some more painful sting, always some hotter hell. Take care how you treat life. Do not imagine that you can complain without being heard, and that you can be heard without punishment immediately following. This is the mystery of life; this is the fact of life. We cannot reason ourselves out of it. Whatever metaphysical universe we may construct, we have to lie

down at night in the concrete universe which the almighty God has made and is governing. It is not enough to find fault with marvellous things in the Holy Book, as if they never could have been real in the narrow sense in which we define reality, because, when our peddling criticism has done its utmost, there remains the fact, that complaint means suffering, peevishness means agony, discontent means the failure of every sanctuary of rest and every refuge of confidence. "Go: sin no more," said Christ, "lest a worse thing come upon thee." There is always a worse thing to come. Do not press God; do not challenge the Most High. Do not say,—If there is anything worse than this, I cannot imagine it. Things are not limited by our imagination. The chariots of God are twenty thousand, and as for the number of his weapons, no man has been in his armoury to reckon up the sum-total of the weapons. God is a consuming fire. God's wrath cannot be directed by the futile hand of man. How, then, is the fire to be extinguished? How is the wrath to be turned aside, or to be pacified, or to be brought into the harmonic movement of the universe? To that human riddle there is no human answer. He who sent the serpent must remove it; he who inflicted the punishment must lift his hand, for we cannot turn it aside. So we find God not only the Punisher of Israel but the Saviour of his Church and people in the wilderness. Moses was commanded to make a serpent of brass, to put it upon a pole, to set up the symbol; and whosoever looked towards it, having been bitten of the fiery flying serpent, was healed because he looked. In wrath God remembers mercy: he will not impose severe efforts upon those who have been punished by the fiery flying serpent; he will have but the turned eye, the significant look, the glance that means the soul. His terms are easy; his burden is not heavy; his yoke is not oppressive. The great condition is—Believe, and thou shalt be saved. Look unto him, all ye nations of the earth—the look of the heart—and the answer will be redemption, salvation, pardon, heaven. This is very easy,—and yet it is not so easy as it appears to be. The look must not be merely a glance of distress;—it must be the expectancy of faith, the eager look which means God will give salvation to the eyes that are directed towards him. To adopt a Christian term, this vision

means "faith"; to preach a Christian gospel my words must be brought from the Scriptures themselves: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." How? By reasoning? by argument? by high controversy? by some pitched battle of words? No; but by self-renunciation, and by the look that means prayer, and by the expectation that expresses the trust of the soul. Why preach on this ancient incident? It is not so ancient. Why now refer to a brazen serpent? Because Christ referred to it, because Paul referred to it. The New Testament records the story. Christ believed it, Paul believed it—I will not separate myself from them and create some instance of unbelief or rejection; I will rather say with Paul,—Take care: do not murmur as some of the Israelites murmured in the wilderness and were bitten of fiery flying serpents. I will use the incident as a warning. I would rather say with Christ—"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." If Paul believed it, if Christ applied it, I know enough of them to know that they did not avail themselves of myths, of incidents that never occurred, of imaginary instances. I know enough of their general character and temper and spirit—I know what they did for the benefit of their race and day, and for the benefit of the whole world, to be fully aware that where they adopted a history it would be unwise upon my part to reject it. Let us, therefore, gather around the incident as a solemn warning; and, having been all but overpowered by the awfulness of the example, let us turn in the upward direction, see the descending God, listen to his instructions to his servants, look upon the brazen serpent as a symbol; let us pass from the symbol to the reality—the uplifted Son of God. One look of the soul, and we shall be healed; one expression of deepest trust, and the load of guilt shall be removed; one vision of the meaning of the Cross, and all the pain and shame and death, consequent upon guilt, shall be done away; and we shall know the meaning of Christ's own words: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless thee for great gospels, wondrous speeches of love, revelations of mercy, mysteries which astound the imagination, and appeals which seek and secure the deepest confidence of the heart. We come to thee, in the name that is above every name, as through a wide open gate, set open on purpose that we might be admitted to the throne of the heavenly grace, there to sing our psalm, charged with joy and adoration, and there to breathe our thanksgivings and utter our desires. We love the name of Jesus Christ. We love it most when we are most heart-broken; we cling to it with the greater tenacity when we know that there is no redeeming help in ourselves, and that our salvation is of God and not of man. We bless thee for a sweet gospel that can wait—that will wait, that will come to us in the darkness as if we had not affronted it, and offer again its great offers of mercy and pity, love and help, and will seek to win us to the light and to the truth. We cannot have peace until we have God's pardon—and is not abundance of pardon succeeded by a peace that passeth all understanding? Is not the blessing equal to thy great speech of love? When thou dost release us, thou dost seal the release with a calm like thine own tranquillity. Regard all worshipping spirits, all up-looking and mightily-praying hosts, and astonish thy Church by the brightness of thy rising, and set upon every believer the stamp of thy personal majesty. Thus shall we be known in our day and generation as not of this world, but always seeking a country out of sight. May we, with sandals upon our feet and staves in our hands, be constantly moving on to the city which hath foundations whose Builder and Maker is God, doing all the work of the present little space with the eager haste which tells how the heart longs to be at home in the fuller liberty and in the larger service. Amen.

Numbers xxi. 9

"And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived."

THE SYMBOLICAL SERPENT.

HAS not the serpent bitten every man? We come, thus, by our questioning, into larger meanings and ultimate truths. These alphabetic incidents did not terminate in themselves. An alphabet was never created for its own use as a

mere set of unrelated and incoherent symbols. He who makes an alphabet makes, in purpose, a library in the language which that alphabet represents. The early people in the Bible lived the alphabet life, the symbolic and significant life; and in after-ages we come to consolidation and consequence, to profound and eternal meanings. The serpent of brass was but a poor invention if it began and ended in itself. By the very necessity of the case it means more than the mere letter expresses. So we return to the opening question,—Is not every man bitten by the serpent? If this were a question to be determined by argument, into what high and fruitless words and controversies we might enter, coming out of them with nothing but sense of tumult and weariness! Every man knows that he has been bitten through and through. The appeal is not to merely grammatical expression and critical definition of letters and words: the solemn appeal is to consciousness—not the consciousness of any one particular moment—it may be, as when the life fritters itself away in some vain frivolity, or is engaged in admiration of some vain symbol or object, or when it is excited by transient controversy, or momentary challenge and appeal of any kind, relating to earthly experience, which can be terminated by temporal adjustments and compensations;—consciousness is not set up within that small excitement. Take the consciousness right through the whole life, and, though we may avoid theological expressions, religious terms, and turn our back upon Biblical symbolism and allusion, yet right away at the core is a throb, a spasm, an accusation, a sense of restlessness which, perhaps, the theologian with the Bible in his hand can better turn into words than can any other man. Your life is not a plain surface, without wound or bruise or mark of cruel tooth; it is a torn thing, crumpled up by great forces, punctured by sharp bodkins, made sore by many a keen stroke. Things will turn themselves upside down. Prayer does not go up like untroubled incense to the sun. Things do get out of place; words will come wrongly both as to time and as to setting; temper will rise; bad blood is fast made in the moral system. What is this? Having heard what men say about it in explanation, we have come to the conclusion that no terms so correctly express our consciousness, so thoroughly satisfy our own sense

of reality, so completely fill our capacity of imagination, as the old words which are found in Holy Scripture. We change them or modify them, or perform upon them some magical rearrangement; but they are best let alone. Their very setting seems to be of God; they are not loose jewels to be set haphazard as any man's fancy may dictate: each is set in its right place by the finger of God. We know this serpent; we have been associated with its history. If we cannot see it, we can see the tooth-mark it has left. We know that we are wounded men. As the poet, then, has well said,—“To know one's self diseased is half the cure.”

There are, as a matter of fact, incurable physical diseases. The doctor looks, and says,—They are beyond my reach. He looks at all his resources, and, shaking his head significantly, he says, I have no weapon with which I can fight successfully this assailant; there is no hope; but a few days may come and go, and then—the last deep sleep. Why, then, may there not be incurable spiritual diseases—that is to say, incurable by any remedy known to men? We have no hesitation in confessing that some physical diseases are incurable, why should we falter over the case of spiritual disease and trouble? Why hesitate to say—We are lost men; there is no health in us; we are dead men before God; the law we cannot answer; conscience we cannot appease; our own small imagination has no poem or dream by which it can cover up this sense of guilt and absolute unworthiness? Why not put our hand upon our mouth and our mouth in the dust, and say,—Unclean; unprofitable; unworthy; undone! That word must be spoken if any better language is ever to be set in the soul as fit speech of a new liberty and a recovered and assured sonship. What word can better express the sense of loss and helplessness than the Bible word “unclean,” or “unpardonable,” or “unworthy,” or “undone”? The soul says—That is the right word; that sacred term is no human invention; it touches with exquisite precision the very meaning I have been toiling to express. So long as we imagine that we can cure ourselves, we shall not look in the right direction for healing. We are not ashamed to go to others for bodily healing, why this reluctance or hesitation to go out of ourselves and beyond ourselves for spiritual healing? No sick man apologises

for going to the physician. Do we not sometimes lament the obstinacy of men saying,—They will not take advice; they will persist in their own course; they become the victims of their own ignorance; if they would only call in adequate advice they might be well presently? What is the full meaning of such expressions? We speak that we do not know in all the fulness of its possible meaning and force. That is the complaint of the motherly universe over her child that will try to cure himself: she says,—Poor sufferer! why turn in upon thyself, and waste thy supposed cleverness in attempting to do impossibilities?—the secret of restoration is not in thee: in thee alone is the writing and condemnation of death; life is elsewhere; look for it; I do not say, Go for it, for that might imply impossible effort; but thou canst at least move an eye-lid in the direction of the remedy, thou canst at least turn a languid eye in the direction to which I point; the meaning of that turned eye will be that thou hast given up all thought of saving thyself or finding health where there is none; look! look! look up and be saved! It is a gentle force; it falls into the harmony of our daily experience and action in relation to other things; it has upon its side what controversial force there may be in the fact of harmony, rhythm, sound rational analogy. The reason is not suspended: it is elevated, it is touched with a higher glory, it is summoned to a nobler attestation of its supreme and divine function. “Come now, and let us reason together,” saith the Lord. Who is not pleased to say that he has in time of illness taken the very highest advice which the latest science can supply? Is he not somewhat proud of so explaining his position? He has not called in some inferior doctor; or availed himself of cheap advice; he has not turned in the direction of inexperienced wisdom; but has gone with plentiful gold in his hand and knocked at the highest medical prophet’s door, and the prophet has condescended to come down to him and treat him with marked distinction. He decorates his dreary tale by such small and vain allusions as these. Even here we may find some point of suggestion, rather than of analogy. Who calls us? Anyhow, the call is from God, even in the poetry and idealism of the case. This is no infant deity that asks to play with the soul’s malady, and by spiritual vivisection learn something of which he is now ignorant. Even in

the poetry, in the dream, it is the Eternal God that calls for the wounded men. We are not handed over to inexperience, to mere sympathy or pity on the part of fellow-sufferers ; it is the Physician of the universe that asks us to be healed.

So, if in the terms of Scripture we are humbled, crushed, set back with such contempt as holiness may feel for iniquity, yet, on the other side, it is God who calls us to be healed, it is the Eternal who stoops to us, it is the Mother of the universe that cries for the child-earth. If we cannot rise to theological awe, we are bound to respond to poetic harmony and completeness. We go out of ourselves for consolation—why hesitate to go out of ourselves for the greater blessing salvation ? We are thankful when some friend who knows the secret of the low tone and the gentle speech, quiet as dew, sweet as honey, calls upon us in the dark time, when the heavy load is crushing the whole strength ; we say we will never forget the call ; we treasure the words that were spoken ; memory says,—I will never forget the sweet prayer, the noble supplication ; the holy pleading ; it was a visit as of an angel, full-robed, charged with special messages. If we can speak so about consolation in the time of sorrow, bereavement, pain, loss,—if we say we owe the solace to another—why this pitiful reluctance to say salvation is of God ? It is no human devising : it is the thought of the Eternal. There is no salvation in the self-destroyed man : his help cometh from the hills of heaven and from the throne of eternity. Are we not dignified—yea, even glorified—by the fact that our salvation is of God and not of man ? If we would see what human nature really is, as to its dignity and grandeur and possible destiny, we must go to the very Book which humbles it with the severest reproaches. God did not send his Son to recover other than his own image : when the Son came, he spoke the native language of the race he came to redeem : he is not ashamed to be called our Brother. The very fact, therefore, that we are not saved by man but by God reveals the value of the nature which God stooped to redeem.

The great thought of all is, that the cure, as well as the disease, in the case of ancient Israel, came from God. The God who punished was the God who saved. Find an instance in the whole Scripture in which healing or preservation is connected with the name of the enemy of man, Satan—that old serpent,

the devil. This is a marvellous thing. If all the Bible writers had lived in the same age and held common consultation as to the structure and form of their book, they might have made a mechanical arrangement which would have secured an artificial symmetry and unity; but they were separated by centuries; they were sundered, in some instances, by thousands of years; in many instances they did not know what would be written or what was written in its completeness;—yet, when all the fragments are brought together, in no case do I find that the devil is ever credited with having attempted really to do man substantial good, to heal him, to help him. The help which the Bible dwells upon, whatever it may be, is uniformly and consistently connected with the divine name. It is God who is mighty to save. He that cometh up from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah, arrayed in his apparel, is red with his own precious blood.

Suppose we treat all this in the meantime symbolically, poetically,—is there not still a grand moral suggestion arising out of this perfect harmony and absolute unity? and do not the lines so interlace and co-work in all their outgoing as to suggest a noble argument? God only can wound. Injury of a certain kind is said to be inflicted by the devil; but even that is not the permissible tone. In the profoundest sense of the term all punishment for wrong-doing is from God; all trials of our spiritual quality are from God. Can there be evil in the city and the Lord not have done it? In the letter, that is a mystery; in its innermost meanings and most comprehensive bearings and issues it is a fact attested by religious consciousness. The enemy himself is but a permitted disgrace in the universe. Do not let us magnify the devil into co-partnery as to the division of the universe. He—the starry leader of the seven—is but allowed to live—the ages will tell us why. The Lord reigneth: wherefore comfort one another with these words.

What is the New Testament use of the incident recorded in the Book of Numbers? Jesus Christ took up this text, and from it preached himself. “Beginning at Moses”—he could not begin earlier as to the letter—he preached himself. Hear his words:—“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him

should not perish, but have eternal life." Jesus Christ having quoted the passage, we need not hesitate to receive it. If Jesus Christ had passed it by, we might also have turned away from the sacred symbol or have classed it with some obsolete mythologies. Where Jesus Christ rested, we too may sit down. Jesus sat upon the well—would God we could have sat around his feet and looked up into his heaven-shining eyes! Where he lingers, I would gladly stay. He lingers here: he saw in that serpent a worse foe of the human race than ever bit the flesh of man; he saw in that pole, or standard, a cross; he saw in that uplifted serpent of brass the symbol of himself; and said he,—“I, if I be lifted up, . . . will draw all men unto me.” We believe in Christ; we are not ashamed to utter his name; we do not adopt all that has been said about it by ignorance, inexperience, and perverted ingenuity; but putting aside all these things, we go straight to him and say each for himself,—“My Lord, and my God!” We come to the uplifted Man, we come to the crucified Christ, not to talk, but to look, to pray without words, to begin to speak and to be choked by our own speech. Look unto him and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth. Lord, to whom can we look, but unto thee? We have gone to many, and have only received riddles for replies, enigmas in exchange for mysteries, and contradiction where we begged for peace. Wilt thou take us in? We have come to thee last: we have knocked at every door like cringing beggars, and only because we could not find satisfaction we have come to thee. If we could have eaten bread elsewhere, we would have stayed; but when we asked for bread, they gave us a stone. Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us! If last of all God sent his Son, last of all the sinner accepts the Son, coming without price in his hand, without defence in his heart, and casts himself in living, loving, hopeful faith upon the Son of God. It may be delusion—it may be some horrid nightmare; but in the meantime nothing gives such rest, such peace, such sense of union with God. In this faith we live, and in death will test the **mystery.**

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD we cannot live without thee. Thy smile is heaven. To know that thou art looking upon us is a judgment. We can answer it with a good heart, if so be thy Christ be in us, our Saviour and our Priest. We can bear the light when he is with us—yea, a light above the brightness of the sun. He himself is light, and in him is no darkness at all; and if he is in us, and we are in him, behold, in thy light we see light, and we love the light because of its revealing power. Give us more light. We die if we have not light enough. Thou hast made us to live in light and not in darkness. We wither away, as if struck with ice and chilled through and through, if thy light be not in us,—a brightness and a warmth, a continual blessing, an eternal hope. Once we loved darkness rather than light, but now thou hast brought us out of darkness into a marvellous light. All light is marvellous, but thy light most marvellous of all. It shows the reality of things; it finds its way into the soul; it reveals and discloses what is excluded from every other ministry. We, therefore, ask for light, more light, and more still, until the night be driven away and life become one eternal morning. Thou dost comfort us with light; yea, a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. We seem to be akin to that sun of thine: we claim one another; the heart answers the gospel of light, and we would go forth and see all the wizardry which thy sun works in the grandness of the field and the beauty of the garden. But thou dost work still more wondrously within us. Thou dost make all things new; old age is driven away; death is taken up, as by a giant's hand, and abolished by infinite strength: death is swallowed up in victory, and life has become immortality. These are wonderful things to say to a man. Thou hast said them: they are all written in thy book. We do not understand them—nor would we: for what we understand we come at last to condemn. We would live in wonder—in the continual appeal to our noblest imagination; we would live in the certainty that we do not know all things, and never can know them, and that to know God is to be God. Therefore do we stand afar off, without shoe upon our foot or staff in our hand, with bowed head, listening if in the warm wind we may hear at least some one tone that will tell us of wider places, infinite liberties, glorious heavens, days without night. Thou art visiting us constantly with visitations that are meant to be instructive. Thou dost take away the old traveller, so that in the morning we miss the pilgrim who has accompanied with us these many days—only the staff is left behind, the traveller is gone forward. Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord. Comfort those who are feeling the chill of death, the encroachment of the

graveyard upon their household hearth ; speak comfortingly to them, and show them that light is above, that home is on high, that here we have no continuing city, that permanence is beyond the clouds. The Lord make up for losses of this kind in so far as they can be made up, for great vacancies in the heart—the eyes looking with expectancy and beholding nothing, the ear listening for accustomed appeals, and no more appeal addressed to the hearer. We need the Lord's comfort : some warm word, some gracious speech,—yea, some great trumpet sound, that shall swallow up the mean noises of earth, and rule into harmony and order and sacred and ennobling thought all tumult and fear, all apprehension and pain. Save us from folly ! We are prone to it ; we like it : we roll it under our tongue as a sweet morsel. We sometimes feel as if we were the children of fools, and were born to be fools greater still. We think the earth is all : the blue sky is an exclusion not an inclusion ; to our mean thought, the lights that glitter in it are but points of amber—not flaming gates falling back upon radiant heavens ; we gather up things with both hands, and hide them and cover them up so that nobody else may see them, and this we call prosperity ; yea, we put our money into bags with holes in them ; we sow plentiful seed, and others reap the harvest ; we build our tower that is to reach unto heaven, and whilst we are putting on the topstone, builder and building are thrown to the ground. The little child dies, and the old man, business withers, health gives way, the house totters without our being able to find out why ; we live in uncertainty ; we are walking upon the edge of a precipice ; we know not what will happen to-morrow—so near a time as that. God pity us !—for God made us—and send us the messages we need. Revive our hope ; establish our confidence ; bind us to the infinite meaning of the Cross ; there we see with the heart that thy Cross is greater than our sin, that thy grace is infinitely more than our guilt. The Cross is the place of vision. Amen.

Numbers xxii.

BALAAM.

BALAAM comes into the narrative most suddenly ;—but he will never go out of it again. Other men have come into the Bible story quite as suddenly ; but they have only remained for a time. Balaam will never disappear : we shall read of him when we come to the Book of the Revelation of John the Divine. There are some historical presences you can never get rid of. It is useless to quibble and question. The same mystery occurs in our own life. Some persons, having been once seen, they are seen for ever. You cannot get away from the image or the influence, or forget the magical touch of hand or mind or ear ; they turn up in the last chapter of your life-Bible. You

cannot tell whence they come : their origin is as great a mystery as is the origin of Melchisedek ; they come into your life-lines as quickly and abruptly as came Elijah the Tishbite ; and they take up their residence with you, subtly colouring every thought, and secretly and mightily turning speech into new accents and unsuspected expressions, full of significance, and revealing that significance in ever-surprising ways and tones. Why sit down and look at the story of Balaam as though it were something that occurred once for all ? It occurs every day. God teaches by surprise. He sets the stranger in our life, and while we are wondering, he turns our wonder into some sublimer mystery. Who would have a life four-square, in the sense of limitation, visible boundary, tangible beginning and ending ? Who would not rather be in the world as if he had been in some other world, and as if he were moving on to some larger world ? We lose power when we lose mystery. Let us not chaffer about words. If the spirit of mystery is in a man, the spirit of worship is in him ; and if the spirit of worship is in him, it may detail itself into beliefs, and actions, and services, which are accounted right, and whose rightness will be proved by their beneficence. Balaam comes as suddenly as Melchisedek, as unexpectedly as Elijah ; but we shall find him at the very last an instructive historical character. He is called Balaam the son of Beor, and he is located at Pethor on the river Euphrates. At that time the king of Moab was called Balak, and when Balak saw how Israel had destroyed the Amorites, he said,—Fighting is out of the question ; if we have to come to battle, we may as well surrender before we begin ; the numbers are overwhelming. "Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel" (xxii. 3). Balak said,—“Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field” (xxii. 4). You can hear the lick and the crunch, and be present at the destruction. It was a day of fear and much sorrow in Moab. What, then, was to be done ? Herein came the wisdom of Balak. He also lives to the end of life's chapter, for to the end of that chapter we shall find the touch of superstition in the human mind. Balak would have recourse to supernatural help. He had heard of Balaam the soothsayer of Pethor—a man of divination, a person who had power to bless and to curse—the Simon

Magus of his day ; so he took advantage of his superstition, and thought to sow the air with curses which would work where his little sword could not reach. That is not a mean thought. Call it perversion, or superstition, you do not touch the inner and vital mystery of the case. The great agonies of life are not to be explained by calling them perversions, or labelling them superstitions, or denouncing them as nightmares or dreams : they are there. Man must obey voices which are not always articulate and reportable as to words and tones. It may be more superstitious to deny the supernatural than to affirm it. Never forget the cant that is talked against cant. Do not believe that they are the heavenly, pure, brilliant souls who have no Church, no religion, no altar,—who live under the dome of their own hats and walk on the marble of their own boots. Whose prophets, pray, are they ? They must be accounted for, as well as the Melchisedeks, the Balaams, and Elijahs of old time. What is their history ? Where have they made their mark ? What marvels of beneficence have they performed ? Or do they only live in the very doubtful region of sneering at other people's piety ? Balak's was a great thought. We do not adopt its form, but we should perhaps do unwisely to reject its spirit and intent. Balak said,—Numbers are against us ; if it is to be a mere contention of army against army, Moab will be destroyed at once ; the thing to be done—if it can be done—is to enlist the service and action of the supernatural. Quite right. We say so now. If that can be done, any other thing that can be done is contemptible in comparison. All the little inventions and tricks and arts of man, in arranging and rearranging and adjusting and adapting, are beneath contempt compared with the discovery of the spring of life, the spring of thought. If one could read the heart of man and understand his thought afar off, that—if possible—would throw all other acquisitions into the shade, and reduce them to puerility and nothingness. If it cannot be done, still the audacious imagination that it *might* be done is a force that might play a very beneficent part in human thinking and human service : it might ennoble the mind, it might create a holy impatience with all little and transitory things, it might enlarge the soul's whole outlook, and constrain all life into an attitude of prayer and expectation. That, indeed, is prayer. The words are not

the prayer. Herein we make the continual blunder of supposing that the sentences are the prayer. As well say the body is the man ; as well say the house is the tenant. The prayer is in the sentences—wrapped up in them ; a spirit impatient with the sentences, frowning upon them because so empty, so short, so inadequate. Prayer is the very mystery of breathing. Balak's thought, therefore,—let us say again and again—was an anticipation of the greatest of all thoughts, namely, that the spiritual is mightier than the material. The man who lays down that proposition commits no crime against reason. Suppose it to have entered into some man's mind—altogether apart from what is known in Christian countries as revelation—that a thought is mightier than an arm. It is a sublime conception, whoever conceived it in his own imagination. The man seems to be going upon the right line ; he is not a man to be jeered at. He suggests that "knowledge is power." Take down the sentence ; write it in a book ; on hearing it, we feel as if we might be ready to die for its exposition and vindication. Some bold man has said—let us suppose,—Could we get at the Ruling Spirit of the universe and enlist that Spirit upon any given side of a controversy, that would be the winning side. Now you say so, we feel the possible wisdom of the reasoning ;—nay, more, of course it must be so. Your argument is, that were it possible—about which we do not dogmatise—were it possible to get hold of the Force, whatever it be, that made all things, that holds all things, that rules all things—that would be getting hold of omnipotence and securing the soul within the walls of a sanctuary that cannot be violated. Yes, we admit it, if—. But that *if* does not destroy the reasoning ; that *if* does not turn the reasoner into a mere dreamer, or sentimentalist, or fanatic ; he stands behind his *if* as a great man. To have driven up to that *if* is some progress in human thinking. Better die behind that *if*, with great tears of disappointment in your eyes, than live the narrow, superficial, selfish life. It would seem to be a mile nearer home. It would seem as if any spirit that may be behind things must answer the reverent audacity that says to the universe,—This is not all : I fling it from me, and hope. "Such a thought," the heart says, "cannot be turned to disappointment ; it must evoke any fire of Deity that may be burning

behind the visible stars." The idea has occurred to Balak that *if* he can enlist the services of a man who is a spell-binder—a man who can curse or bless, *if* he can enlist the supernatural on his side, then Israel may be ten times as many as Israel is, yet they shall be but a multitude of grasshoppers. Balak in his superstition is not a man to be smiled upon as if he had committed some act of harmless lunacy.

So Balak sent for Balaam, who made answer that he would not go. By-and-by, Balak sent other princes more honourable still, with offers of promotion and honour and abundant wages. Balaam said he would ask God. He asked God, and angered him by so doing. Some second prayers are worse than superstitions. So God said,—“If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them”—take thine own way; no secondary use shall be made of me, but go—“yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do” (xxii. 20). “God’s anger was kindled” against Balaam. “And God’s anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. But the angel of the Lord stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side” (xxii. 22–24).

When Balak heard of Balaam’s arrival he was glad. Gold went for nothing, now the soothsayer had come. Riches were as water poured forth. In those days the supernatural went for something in the market-place. It is the cheapest of all things now. Ideas are without value; religious thoughts are mere breath. But Balaam remembered that he was only to speak what God told him; so he began to play the priest. He would have altars put up. “He took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel” (xxiii. 7);—and he would have altars put up and sacrifices rendered; and the answer was,—No, Israel cannot be cursed. So Balak took him to another point of view, where, perhaps, the multitude looked greater or did not look so great. “And he

took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor" (xxiii. 18); and again the people were to rise like a lion, and lift up themselves as a young lion; and the people were not to lie down until they had eaten of the prey and drunk of the blood of the slain. Well, then,—Balak said—if that be the case, this thou must do for me, neutralise thyself: be nothing: act as if thou hadst not come at all—"Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all" (xxiii. 25). But Balaam said,—No; you cannot treat God's messengers in that way; as a matter of fact, they are here: you have to account for them being here, and to reckon with them whilst they are here. We cannot quiet things by ignoring them. By simply writing UNKNOWN across the heavens, we really do not exclude supernatural or immeasurable forces. The ribbon is too narrow to shut out the whole heaven; it is but a little strip; it looks contemptible against the infinite arch. We do not exclude God by denying him, nor by saying that we do not know him, or that he cannot be known. We cannot neutralise God, so as to make him neither the one thing nor the other. So Balaam was the greatest mystery Balak had to deal with. It is the same with the Bible—God's supernatural Book. It will not lie where we want it to lie: it has a way of getting up through the dust that gathers upon it and shaking itself, and making its pages felt. It will open at the wrong place;—would it open at some catalogue of names, it might be tolerated, but it opens at hot places, where white thrones are and severe judgments, and where scales are tried and measuring wands are tested. It will speak to the soul about the wrong-doing that never came to anything, and the wicked thought that would have burned the heavens and scattered dishonour upon the throne of God.

"Would to Heaven"—Balak said, in effect—"I could get rid of this man!" He took Balaam to another point of view, and Balaam "set his face toward the wilderness, and took up his parable," and sang a sweet and noble song:—"How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be

higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee." Balak made a bad bargain that day. He had added to his troubles instead of diminishing them. If we invite Christ into the house merely to do our bidding, he will burn the house and he will burn the host that invited him to break bread. We cannot trifle with these mysteries. The Gospel is a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death; the truth is a stone to be fallen upon, or it is a stone which will fall upon those who invoke it. We cannot get rid of these spiritual presences and influences. We seem to do so for a time—I admit it. We are so broad in physical dimensions, so healthy in physical functions, so radiant in physical life, so successful, too, in the market-place; we walk over the course, and bring back the prize; we smile with gracious contempt upon unsuccessful persons, who are labouring all day and bringing back nothing but a handful of wind; we name them by sneering names; we use them as typical instances whereby to excite our own laughter and the laughter of other men. Why, we could not do with a God under those conditions. But all human life is not enclosed within such limited boundaries. Not in any one mood can we determine these great questions. Life, in its sum-total, with all its variations, rapid changes, and increasing responsibilities, must be taken into account.

Balak would gladly have parted with Balaam, but he could not get rid of him; and Balak was wroth. It became a king to become angry. "And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times. Therefore now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honour" (xxiv. 10-11). And Balaam spake a great speech to Balak: he said,—Is this not precisely what I said to the king's messengers? Did I not say, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver

and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind ; but what the Lord saith, that will I speak " ? (xxiv. 13)—now I will tell that which I see. And then came the parable of the man whose eyes are open :—" And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said : He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open : I shall see him, but not now : I shall behold him, but not nigh : there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies ; and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city " (xxiv. 15-19). Then the parable is continued, Balaam looking Balak full in the face ; and last of all " Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place, and Balak also went his way " (xxiv. 25). You cannot carve your God into any shape that will please your fancy. You cannot send for any true faith and bribe it to speak your blessings or your cursings.

Balaam was a man of noble sentiments. Look at some of his words, " Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his ! " (xxiii. 10). And again :—" God is not a man, that he should lie ; neither the son of man, that he should repent " (xxiii. 19). And again : " I shall see him, but not now : I shall behold him, but not nigh " (xxiv. 17). Then take the grand word he spake to Balak as reported in the prophecies of Micah. Say, did ever man preach a nobler sermon than this : " He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God " ? (Micah vi. 8). Who can amend that speech ? Who can refine that gold ? Who dares touch that lily with his mean paint ? Who taught Balaam that great speech ? We sometimes say we find scattered up and down in ancient literature morals as beautiful as any we find in the Bible. Possibly so. Who wrote them ? Whence did they come ? Is God the God of one corner of the creation ? Is God

a parochial Deity? Is there not a spirit in man—universal man—and doth not the Spirit of the Most High give him understanding? Wherever there is a line of beauty, God wrote it; wherever there is a sentiment which is charged with the spirit of beneficence, that may be claimed as a good gift of God. The Apostle Paul never uttered a nobler sentiment than is uttered by Balaam, as reported in the prophecies of Micah. This is the Sermon upon the Mount in anticipation. That is the vicious Church, built on the wrong foundation, aiming at the wrong heaven, which does not recognise in every literature and in every nation all that is good, noble, wise, prophetic.

Balaam's convictions and wishes disagreed sometimes. Therein he was most human. He knew he ought not to go, yet he wished to go. He would ask the second time; he would doubt his own convictions, or he would adjust them according to the shape and temper of circumstances. Wherever he came from, he claims herein to be quite a near neighbour of ours. Doubts may exist as to the exact relation of Pethor to the river upon which it was built, but there can be no doubt whatever of the blood relationship between Balaam and our own age. Speaking impulsively from the centre of his convictions, he said,—No!—nothing shall tempt me to go; you speak of gold and silver—if Balak were to give me his house full of gold and silver, I would not go; I am the Lord's servant, and the Lord's work alone will I do. Then the thought occurred to him—a second message coming, borne by more honourable princes,—Perhaps I might go and obtain this wealth and honour, and still do my duty. He is on the downward road now. A man who thinks to do forbidden things and spend the bounty for the advantage of the Church is lost; there is no power in him that can overcome the gravitation that sucks him downward. He says,—I will bring back all Balak's gold and silver and add a transept to the church or another course of marble to the altar. He will never return. God will not have his house so patched and bungled; nor does he want Balak's gold for the finishing of his sanctuary. A nobler spirit was Abram, who said to the King of Sodom,—No, "lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." Thus do we poison our consciences, pervert our judgment, hold a veil before our eyes; thus do we attempt to look up to heaven and

clutch the advantages of earth. This cannot be done; the whole spiritual gravitation is against it; the law of the Lord is against it. This miracle of evil he never permits his creatures to perform.

NOTE.

Dr. Cunningham Geikie says:—"The whole story is intensely Oriental and primeval. The first deputation is dismissed in obedience to a divine warning: but, so far as we know, "the wages of unrighteousness" which Balaam "loved," are carefully retained. A second embassy of nobler messengers, carrying richer gifts, succeeds. He does not at once dismiss them, as God had required, but presses for permission to go with them, which at last is granted. He would fain earn the wealth and honour apparently in his grasp, yet knows that when the prophetic afflatus comes on him he can only utter what it prompts. With a feigned religiousness, he protests that if Balak were to give him his house full of silver and gold, he could not go beyond the word of Jehovah his God, to do less or more; but he also bids them wait overnight to see if he may not, after all, be allowed to go with them. If his ignoble wish to be allowed to curse an unoffending nation be gratified, he has the wealth he craves: if it be refused, he can appeal to his words as proof of his being only the mouthpiece of God. That he should have been allowed to go with Balak's messenger, was only the permission given every man to act as a free agent, and in no way altered the divine command, that he should bless and not curse. Yet he goes, as if, perchance, at liberty to do either, and lets Balak deceive himself by false hopes, when the will of God has been already decisively made known."

Dr. Samuel Cox says:—"One of the sins brought home to Balaam with extraordinary force and bitterness in the New Testament Scriptures is his venality. And it is impossible to study his career, and to note his ardent love and admiration of righteousness, yet not be struck with surprise and shame at discovering that he loved the wages of unrighteousness, and was capable of prostituting his rare and eminent gifts for hire. Still, do we not find this same strange and pitiful combination of piety and covetousness in Jacob, who was surnamed Israel, 'the Prince with God,' and from whom the whole seed of Abraham have derived their name, and perhaps something more than their *name*? No candid student of his history can deny that, even from the first, Jacob showed a singular appreciation of spiritual things, a singular ambition for spiritual primacy and honour. Nor can any man who accepts the Bible record of him doubt that dreams and visions of the most ravishing beauty, pregnant with the most profound spiritual intention and promise, were vouchsafed him; or that, at least when he blessed his sons from his dying bed, his eyes were opened to behold things that were to befall them and their children years and centuries after he himself had been

gathered to his fathers. Even the oracles of Balaam do not surpass the long series of dooms and benedictions which Jacob was then moved to utter. Yet what was his whole life but, on the one side, a constant endeavour to enrich or secure himself at the cost of others, by superior craft or superior force; and, on the other side, a divine discipline by which that worldly and grasping spirit was chastened out of him, in order that his genius for religion might have free play?

"And, again, who can deny that this love of money, this covetousness which is idolatry, this selfish and grasping spirit, is of all sins that which always has been, and is, most common and prevalent in the Church, and even among sincerely religious men? It clothes itself with respectability as with a garment, and walks often unrebuked, often flattered even and admired, in almost every assembly of the saints. How many of *us* are there who, if we love righteousness, also hanker after the wages of unrighteousness, after the opulence, the gratifications, the success which can only come to us through a selfish and worldly, *i.e.*, a sinful life! No transgression is more common than this among spiritual men, though none is more fatal to the spiritual life, since none renders a man more impervious to the rebukes of conscience or the warnings of the Word and Spirit of God.

"Or take that other and grosser crime which we have seen brought home to Balaam, the sensuality that made the foul device by which the early innocence of Israel was debauched, familiar, or at best not impossible to him. Is it difficult to find a parallel to that? It would not be fair, though many would think it fair, to cite the example of David's well-known sin; for no sin was ever more deeply repented than his, as few have been more terribly avenged. But think of Solomon; think of the beauty and promise of his youth. Recall his choice of a wise and understanding heart above all the luxuries of wealth and all the flatteries of power. Read his wonderful prayer when he dedicated himself and all the resources of his kingdom to the service of Jehovah, and invoked a blessing on all who at any time and from any place should turn to the Temple and call on the name of the Lord. And then remember that this most religious king, this great prophet who 'spake three thousand proverbs and whose psalms were a thousand and five,' to whose heart God gave a largeness like that of the sea, sank into the very sin of sensual idolatry with which Balaam betrayed Israel, suffering his wives and concubines to turn away his heart from the Lord his God, till at last he fell from his harem into his grave, an unloved tyrant, a jaded voluptuary, and probably a believer whose faith was shot through and through with a pessimistic scepticism."

Numbers xxii. 22-35.

22. And God's anger was kindled because he went : and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him.

23. And the ass saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand : and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field : and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way.

24. But the angel of the Lord stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side.

25. And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall : and he smote her again.

26. And the angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left.

27. And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she fell down under Balaam : and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff.

28. And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times ?

29. And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me : I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee.

30. And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day ? was I ever wont to do so unto thee ? And he said, Nay.

31. Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand : and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.

32. And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times ? behold, I went out to withstand thee,—because thy way is perverse before me :

33. And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times : unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive.

34. And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned ; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me : now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again.

35. And the angel of the Lord said unto Balaam, Go with the men : but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

BALAAM STOPPED BY AN ANGEL.

ONE of the most pious and profound commentators has suggested that all this was seen in a vision; in other words, the narrative may be taken as Balaam's report of a very marvellous dream. Any suggestion will do when men want to get rid of the supernatural. Under such circumstances, the very indifferent man may become an important personage. Anything that will rid us of lines beyond our own personal experience, and give us a sense of comfortable snugness within four visible points, will be received with gratitude by the natural heart. We like insulation. We are pleased with a clock that we can see, every tick of which we can hear, and every indication of which we can read. But the clock is not the time. The time is invisible, impalpable, in many regards incalculable; quite a ghost, a very solemn thing, always talking, and yet talking in a way that is not always clearly apprehended or understood. People like to be comfortable, and nobody can be comfortable with the supernatural who is not in harmony with it. If a certain miracle has not been wrought in the soul, the supernatural becomes a kind of ghost, a spectral presence, an uncanny possibility in the life, and had better be got rid of; and when the mind wants such riddance, any suggestion that will aid in that direction is received with effusive thankfulness. In this instance, we had better, perhaps, in the first place, endeavour to find out what are those things in the story which do lie within the limit of our own experience—an experience which we are in danger of exaggerating into a kind of instinct and claim of infallibility. First of all, therefore, instead of troubling the mind with vexing questions which never can be settled, let us collect the lessons which are obviously within the circle of our own observation and experience; after that, we may be in a position to look at certain miraculous aspects and ascertain their import and their divine intention.

It lies quite within our experience that we do get our own way, and yet have a sense of burning and judgment, of opposition and anger all the time. Balaam was invited to go to Balak's country and he said,—No. He said No with some emphasis. He was a man of fine impulse, and his first impulse was

generally healthy and strong in a right direction. Instead of giving a hesitant No he gave a bold round thunderous NO! Then Balak tried again; he also believed in importunity. He doubled the bribe,—nay, he may have multiplied the bribe by ten. He sent more honourable princes; men who in their own country were accustomed to command, and they assumed the obeisant attitude with great grace and humility. Balaam said,—No. But all the thunder had gone out of that No; it was a No which a mean man might have said. However—he said—I will pray about it, I will consult the Lord—when he need not have consulted the Lord at all. Men forget that there is a time when they need not ask the Lord any questions. Never trouble the Lord to know whether you cannot do just a little wrong; he is not to be called upon in relation to business of that kind. He does not pray who palters with moral distinctions, who wants to make compromises, who is anxious to find some little crevice or opening through which he can pass into the land of his own desire. Whimpering hypocrite! miserable miscreant! thou wilt pray in order to get leave to go in the direction pleasant to the imagination or profitable to the pocket and call it prayer!—wilt consult the oracle, wilt look to heaven, wilt inquire diligently in the Scriptures, wilt endeavour to find out some sign indicating what God means thee to do, whilst before thou didst pray thou hadst fashioned the answer. It was a mocker's religion. Balaam got his own way so far. The Lord has a method of his own in this particular. Providence does shape itself curiously in some instances. The voice said to him,—Go!—you want to go; you have made up your secret mind to go,—go; only the word that I bid thee speak, that shalt thou say; and Balak, who sent for an ally, shall find himself confronted with a missionary. These things lie quite obviously within our own experience. We need not describe them at all as theological; we have seen this in a score of instances,—perhaps, in some instances, we ourselves have been the chief actors and sufferers. So far then we are upon the line of experience.

Men are stopped in certain courses without being able to tell the reason why. That also is matter of experience. The wind seems to be a wall before us; the road looks quite open, and yet we can make no progress in it. Our eyes deceive us, because

surely this is a highway—the king’s broad road—and yet, scheme as we may, promise what we may, we can make no progress along that road. If an army met us, we could run home, and say,—Lo ! a host beset us, and we have fled before the furious opposition. But there is no army. If some beast of prey had rushed out from the hedge, we could have turned back and explained to our comrades in life that we were stopped by a threatening beast. But there is no such difficulty on the road that is at all visible to us. We lift up our hand, and say we will go in this direction, oppose us what may,—and there is nothing to strike at. Again and again do we say,—How is this ?—we came the first two miles easily, pleasantly, as if galloping over a flowery land at bright summer time, and we said in our hearts,—This journey will be a right pleasant one all through ; and suddenly we can go no farther. This is matter of experience. Let us constantly say to ourselves : We cannot account for the impossibility of progress. The business stands still ;—we have risen at the same hour in the morning, carried out the usual arrangements, been apparently on the alert all the time ; and yet not one inch farther are we permitted to go. Suppose we have no God, no altar, no Church limitations, no ghostly ministry exerting itself upon our life and frightening us with superstition and spectre—we are healthy reasoners, downright robust rationalists,—men who can take things up and set them down, square-headed men,—yet there is the fact, that even we—such able-bodied rationalists, such healthy souls that any society would insure us on the slightest inquiry—there we are, puzzled, mystified, perplexed, distracted. We will not use theological terms : we fall back upon the second grade of language ; still there remains the substantial and abiding fact, that progress along this road is impossible. So far, this story affords no ground of serious difficulty, even to the reason and the mind in its soberest mood.

It also lies within the region of experience that men are rebuked by dumb animals. That is odd ; but it is true. The whole Scripture is charged with that statement, and so charged with it as to amount to a practical philosophy in daily life :—“But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee ; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee ”—“The stork in heaven

knoweth her appointed times"—"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib"—"Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise." Dumb creatures are continually teaching us. They keep law with wondrous obedience. The poorest brutes are really very faithful to the rude legislation under which they live. If men could only be as drunk as a beast, they would never go far from the paths of sobriety. It is a foul slander upon the beast for a man to set himself beside it and say that he is as oblivious of law, as negligent of divine intention, as the brute that perishes. In temperance, in acceptance of discipline, in docility, I know not any beast that is ever used by man that may not teach some men, very distinctly, helpful and useful lessons. That the beast does not speak is the very smallest and poorest objection that can be taken to the teaching. It is putting speech in a false position, it is altogether altering the relations and perspective of things. What is speech? How is speech delivered? Is speech confined to the tongue? We must define the word *speech*, if we are to enter into the particulars of a controversy which can never be settled. But we cannot allow rude definitions to be given as if they were philosophical. There is the substantial fact, that the beasts of the field do teach us, rebuke us, humble us; and that they do not do all this through the medium of articulate speech—as that term is understood by us,—is a frivolous objection, and ought not to be taken account of in any court in which the presiding disposition is to find out substantial and eternal truths. So far, I see nothing in the story to disturb the sobriety of experience.

Then, again, it does lie within our cognition that men do blame second causes for want of success. Balaam blamed the ass. That is what we are always doing. There is nothing exceptional in this conduct of the soothsayer. We want to get on—it is the beast that will not go. Who ever thought that an angel was confronting him—that a distinct ghostly purpose was against him? Who ever imagined that he, a rationalist with a healthy digestion, was stopped on his course by some beneficent providence? He naturally feels that he *ought not* to have been stopped; he is a healthy-minded man, there is no nonsense about him,—a practical man, shrewd, with eyes well-set in his head and that can see one colour in its distinction from another—an

eye skilled in proportion and distance and expression ; he *ought not* to have been stopped. Yet he is arrested. He blames his surroundings, his assistants, his colleagues, his "stupid partner," his "reluctant people." He would have been miles ahead—he might have been back by this time, but he was stopped by second causes. How much nobler the health of the man who says, —I am but of yesterday, and know nothing ; I cannot tell what a day may bring forth ; it is good to be disappointed ; it is beneficial for my soul's health not to have my own way always ; I wanted to go along this road, and to go at a very quick rate, but I am mysteriously arrested, and I cannot move through an invisible wall ; but God built it—I fall down before it as before an altar, and thank God for the stoppage ! To some men, that appears to be the true reasoning. They have such self-distrust—they have seen the consequences of leaning to their own judgment so frequently, they have tested life at so many points and find what a mystery it is—that at last they have come to say,—We see nothing as it really is ; we know nothing as it really is ; we are in the hands of the divine Father ;—not our will but thine be done. To some imaginations, that appears to be fanaticism ; to others—not altogether ridiculous in mental capacity, nor altogether unworthy of credit—really genuinely-learned and cultivated men—it seems to be the finest rationalism, the noblest sobriety, the most substantial conviction.

Does it not also lie within the range of our experience that men do want to get back sometimes but are driven forward ? Did not Balaam want to return when he said, "If it displease thee, I will get me back again" ? We cannot. Life is not a little trick, measurable by such terms. A man cannot make a fool of himself, and instantly turn round as if nothing had happened ; we cannot drive a nail into a tree and take it out without leaving a wound behind. It does not lie within the range of our arm—pontiffs though we be in the shabby church of reason—to break the vessel of glass, and put it together again as if it had never been dashed to pieces. This is not in harmony with the mystery of the universe as we know it. This proposition of Balaam's is the ridiculous imagination of men who suppose that they can sin against God and say,—Now we will turn back ; we will not do it again ; we have blasphemed God—now we will go to

church. To get that sophism out of the human mind is the difficulty of God. It appears so easy to commit a sin, and then to say we are sorry that we committed it, and to go back home as if nothing had been done. What has been done? The universe has been dishonoured; the snowy purity of God has been stained; the great creation in all its harmonies has been shocked and distressed with a great pain. We ought not to infer anything to the disadvantage of God from such a method of providence. It means that we are more than we thought ourselves to be. Conduct is of greater consequence than we imagine. Humanity is a sublime mystery, as well as God; and there is no way backward, unless it be in consent with the Mind that constructed and that rules creation. Balaam would go back and remain at Pethor as if he had never left his native village; but the Lord said,—No; go forward;—only now be the representative of holy truth to the heathen king.

But there is a difficulty about the dumb ass rebuking the perverse prophet? So there is. I would be dismayed by it if I were not overwhelmed by greater miracles still. This has come to be but a small thing—a very momentary wonder, a riddle which a child might guess,—as compared with more astounding circumstances. A more wonderful thing than that an ass should speak is that a man should forget God. If you challenge me to the consideration of both the subjects, and take them in the order of their importance, in proportion as I am a sound reasoner and in a healthy condition of conscience and imagination, I cannot hesitate which to assign the overwhelming importance. That a man should forget deliverances—that a man should be delivered from the jaws of the lion and the bear and should forget the deliverance—that is a more astounding circumstance than that all the beasts of the field should open their mouths in articulate and impressive eloquence. Why do we vex our little selves with little questions, instead of exciting our greater selves by greater problems? The miracle that astounds the Lord is that we should have forgotten that he had nourished and brought up children and that they should have rebelled against him. We—childish, foolish, vain,—are busy with little puzzles in the history of miracles, whilst the infinite impeachment is uttered by all the thunders of the universe, that we have forgotten

God, turned away from the fountain of waters, and have hewn out to ourselves cisterns—broken cisterns—that could hold no water. Riddle-loving, easily tickled and amused, excited by miracles of the smallest quantity and the feeblest quality, we are wondering if the ass *did* speak to Balaam; whilst all the angels of God might stand appalled in looking on any sinful man who ever lifted his hand against the majesty of Heaven. There are historical miracles, there are miracles of a physical and material kind, there are mysteries to which we have no immediate answer; but there are other mysteries which involve destiny, and to these miracles we think it best to address ourselves in the first instance. The miracles of a physical and historical kind may admit of postponement as to their consideration; but that men should have forgotten God, and insulted law, and done unrighteously,—these are mysteries which must not be delayed in their explanation and settlement.

So we come again and again to the great practical inquiry,—Being on the wrong road, how shall we get back? There is no answer in man. If Balaam could have retraced his steps, put up his ass in the stable and gone about his business as if nothing had occurred, it would have been but a paper universe. That he could not do so, that he was under the pressure of mightier forces, indicates that the universe is itself a tragedy, and that the explanation of every character, every incident, and every flush of colour, must be left for another time, when the light is stronger and the duration is assured. Meanwhile, we can pray, we can look up, we can say, each for himself,—“I have sinned.”

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, receive us everyone in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, we humbly beseech thee. There is room in thine heart for every one; thou dost miss the least. Teach us the minuteness of thy care that we may give to thee the keeping of our whole life, reserving nothing for our own regard, but delivering the whole space of life, great and small, to the rule and blessing of Heaven. We will do nothing without thee; though the temptation be strong to arise and move on and begin the battle and seize the gate, yet will we stand still until we are sure of thy bidding to move. Thou hast made one star differ from another star in glory; thou hast set one man above another; thou hast made one life the ruler of many lives. The distribution is entirely in God's hands; we would accept it and adore the sovereignty which it represents. But thou hast a place for every one: thou hast omitted nothing from thy reckoning; to every man thou sayest,—Why stand ye idle in the market-place? thou wilt find a position for every life. We bless thee for this confidence; it delivers us from care; it helps us patiently to wait. Thou hast marked our life by many a sign we cannot mistake. It is thy life: it was thy life before it was ours; it is only ours because it is thine. Thou dost close the door upon us suddenly and open another door that we did not know to be in existence; thou takest away from us our staff and thou puttest into our hand a still stronger one. We cannot tell what thou doest. Thou sendest winter in the midst of summer, and a glow of heavenly light amid the clouds that darken the heavens. Thy will be done evermore. As for our sin, if it is not always present to us, it is always in our heart, a reckoning to be settled, a guilt to be pardoned; but if the sin is there, behold, the Cross of Christ is still within the vision of our faith, and the blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin. We will not fall into despair: we will not turn our imagination into the plague of our life; but looking to the heavens and to thy revelation in the Holy Book and to the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, even in the deep pit we will take heart again and our hope shall be strong in God. Let a morning light be in our hearts; let a gracious blessing make us glad; may the Spirit of the Living One destroy all death within us and make us now joyous and rich with the assurance of immortality. Amen.

Numbers xxxii.-xxiv.

BALAAM'S MANŒUVRES.

BALAAM'S was a manœuvring life: very truthful, and yet very false; very godly, and yet very worldly;—a most composite and self-contradictory life; still a most human life.

Balaam never breaks away from the brotherhood of the race in any of his inconsistencies. When he is very good, there are men living to-day who are just as good as Balaam was; when he is very bad, it would not be difficult to confront him with men who are quite his equals in wrong-doing; when he is both good and bad almost at the same moment, he does not separate himself from the common experience of the race. He was always arranging, adjusting, endeavouring to meet one thing by another, and to set off one thing over against another. It was a kind of gamester-life—full of subtle calculation, touched with a sort of wonder which becomes almost religious, and steeped in a superstition which reduces many of the actions of life to a state of moral mystery wholly beyond ordinary human comprehension.

In the first instance, he poses as a very pious man. So we read: "And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak" (xxii. 38). We may take these words as equivalent to saying,—I am a very pious man; nothing in myself, wholly destitute of intellectual vigour and brightness, and laying no pretension to any conspicuous altitude of a personal kind; I am simply an instrument: I am a mere machine; thou hast sent for me, but in sending for me thou hast but brought to thy side a trumpet through which God must deliver his own message. There was self-consciousness about his piety: he knew that he was a most religious man. We may be too well acquainted with our own religiousness; it may form quite a large object on which our vision is fixed in a kind of trance and adoration. Were we more pious, we should be less conscious of our piety. When we really pray, with all the fulness of divine inspiration, keeping strictly to our necessity, and yet allowing the soul full play as to spiritual communion with God, when the exercise is closed we cannot tell what we have said in mere words: our speech will run to this effect,—Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell; I saw things without shape, I heard voices without articulation, I felt upon me the ministry of light; and as to all the influence exerted upon my soul, that must report itself in the nobleness and beneficence of my life. Self-conscious piety is often impious.

We should know more about Christ and less about ourselves. Yet in any endeavour to avoid self-consciousness, we certainly fall into it. Self-consciousness is not to be escaped by effort, as directed against itself: it is only to be absolutely escaped by growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by such enlargement of faith and multiplication of religious resources as shall cause us to be more occupied with divine things than with our own immediate and measurable relation to them. When we are filled with God, we shall be emptied of ourselves. But let no man judge his brother herein. Some are too keen in finding in others self-regard, self-conceit, and self-consciousness; and refinement vulgarises itself when it fixes upon the vulgarity of other people.

Then Balaam represented, consistently with this first view of his character, a most ostentatious religion. Having come to the field of action, he begins demonstratively. He would have everything done upon an ample scale. The Oriental mind itself shall be satisfied with the gorgeousness of the theatre within which the little magic is to be wrought. So, in the opening of chapter xxiii., we read,—“And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams.” Balak did as Balaam had spoken; Balak and Balaam offered on every altar a bullock and a ram. In the same chapter we read,—“And he brought him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar” (v. 14). Again, we read: “And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven bullocks and seven rams” (v. 29). There was to be no mistake about the preparation. The scaffolding was to portend a magnificent erection. All this lay at an immeasurable distance from the divine purpose and the divine simplicity. This was conjuring: these were the little tricks of a well-paid priest; these were accommodations to the Pagan mind. When we leave simplicity, we leave power. When we build after the fashion of earthly architecture, we forget that the true Builder is God, who builds invisibly but builds for eternity. The prophecy which we are called upon to represent to the age is not a prophecy of demonstration, or show, or spectacle. Balaam wandered from the first principles with which

God had charged his soul. Nothing was said in the original instructions about building altars and slaying bullocks and rams. Word was given to Balaam, but instead of thundering that word at the very first and never changing it and repeating it until it deafened the very men who heard it, because of its resonance and majesty, Balaam betook himself to altar-building and to the keeping of perfect numbers—to the insistence of seven, so that everything might be complete in an outward and mechanical way. Balaam should have made shorter work of it. He had a message to deliver, and the message seemed to be kept back until all the pomp and demonstration had played its little part before the astonished gaze of the king and princes of Moab. That very same thing may be done now. It is possible now to put the Gospel last, and to leave it but small space for its expression. We may elbow out the message by doing things which are but introductory at best, and some of which were never prescribed by directing Heaven. What we want is the message, the great speech, the mighty judgment, the holy revelation. What does God say? What does the Lord require of us? To that inquiry there should be instantaneous, emphatic, and persuasive reply.

Still, consistently with the first and second positions thus discovered in his character, we find upon further inquiry that Balaam displays a highly poetical and sentimental religion. Six times we read the words,—“And he took up his parable.” He spake like an oracle. The parables are marked by nobleness of thought, grandeur and massiveness of expression. There is genuine poetry in the utterances of Balaam; but, so far, the religion which Balaam represents is of a poetic and sentimental and histrionic character. The age needs more than parable. We may be so poetical as to convey a wrong impression as to the message we have to deliver. Poetry has its place. Parable was an instrument well-worked by the divine hand of Jesus Christ himself; but the moral purpose of the parable was never hidden: the meaning of the message was vividly written upon its whole face. The age wants direct speech. There is a kind of poetry that is harmless: it is delightful to the ear, it flows through the organ of hearing and leaves no impress behind; those who hear it say—How lovely! how beautiful! how exceed-

ingly pathetic!—but the whole impression is only for a moment, and never goes in the direction of rousing men to action, to sacrifice, to complete and costly obedience. Balak did not want all these altars and all these parables,—why does Balaam resort to them? Because he did not accept and realise the policy of God. A clear policy would have rendered all altars and parables unnecessary. We should have fewer apologies for our Christian service if we had a distincter conviction of its divine inspiration and absolute human necessity. Why try to decorate our message of judgment? Why these vain endeavours to paint the commandments of God? If we begin to decorate and adorn and garnish and parabolise, so as to miss the point, let us take care lest all this persiflage be so much reckoned against us in the final judgment. The altars were many, the parables were grand, the courtesy, as between prophet and king, was a courtesy perfect in dignity and in grace; but where is the message? It may be right to fold the sword in velvet, but let us beware lest we so enclose the sword in velvet, as practically to deprive it of edge. Beauty we will never exclude, parable we must always welcome as highly illustrative of the truth: we can never forget that parable has been used for the representation of the kingdom of God; but let us, at the same time, beware lest the beauty of the parable should conceal the righteousness of the kingdom, and the splendour and exquisiteness of the decoration should hide in fatal darkness the tremendous Cross of Christ. Balaam was not sent forth to make poems for the Moabites: he was sent forth with one clear errand, and that he ought to have delivered instantly, and not have resorted to conjuring tricks, and to the small devices of a calculating magician.

Balaam represents but too vividly those who build many altars but build no character. How possible it is to be always *near* the Church without being really in it! How possible it is to preach *about* the Gospel without preaching it! This is the infinite danger of all spiritual service. We may be so wearied by things external and visible as to suppose we have rendered the sacrifice, when we have only kindled the coals. The altar is not built for coal-burning but for man-burning. The fire of coals is merely an instrument—part of a process,—but the leaping flame

is an impious irony, if it be left to burn itself out without consuming the human will and the human self-idolatry. It would be easy to say, watching Balaam in all his course,—How particular he is to build altars!—he will insist upon the perfect number; truly, he is a most exact and religious man in all his appointments; even the number must be right, and the beasts must be fit for sacrifice. It is easy to be mechanically right. There is no drain upon a man's life in getting out programmes of service and outlines of effort. It is easy to build the altar and to run away from it; it is not difficult to build an altar and burn a beast upon it. The difficulty is to go to God's altar—an altar built by God's hands, burning with God's fire, and to lie down upon it with the grace of absolute self-surrender.

Is Balaam far from any one of us in the peculiarity of his character which displayed itself in keeping up an open correspondence with heathen persons? He never quite closed the correspondence: even when he refused to go he would have the way open for renewed communications. He might have sent a message to which Balak dare not have replied; but he did not. He would rather seem to have said,—Who knows what may come of this?—we had better not foreclose all communication; in the meantime, I must stand upon my dignity as a wizard or prophet: I must send a message indicating that my services are not to be cheaply or easily engaged; I will say clearly that God will not permit me to go, but I can so say it as to suggest the idea that perhaps even God's commandment may be trimmed and modified; we never can tell what may occur: I will, therefore, give such an answer as will not shut up the correspondence. Is that ancient history? Are not men in precisely that position to-day, in relation to many old associations or tempting opportunities or half-abandoned habits? They know the right, but they cannot speak it with a final emphasis. They are not untruthful, nor are they unfaithful in a degree which involves final apostasy or which ought to be visited by minor excommunication on the part of the Church; still they are in a mood which, being expressed in words, signifies that even yet something may come from the Moabite quarter that may be turned to account,—it will be better, therefore, not to repel with too severe an answer; let the appeal be renewed, or come under

some modified form, and then we will see what can be done. Such action is what we have termed a *manœuvre*—a work of the hand, a clever manipulation; it is not righteous in its soul; the fire may have singed the outside and given a kind of sacrificial colouring to the man, but it has not burned the inner core and wrought in the soul the miracle of burning out the evil spirit. It is possible to be on the right side hesitantly. It is easy to be so far committed to the Church as to be able on occasions to shake off the connection and “deny the soft impeachment.” We are prone to say, when the answer will suit the company,—We often attend the church; we are pleased to be there; attendance upon the service is a season of refreshment and edification. And when it will suit the company we can modify that assertion: we can represent ourselves as being occasionally there, and as having had our wonder partially excited concerning the service; and we can talk truth and tell lies; we can stand back in a manner which, though not chargeable with visible apostasy, means, in the soul of it, treachery towards God. We have nothing to do with Moab; Christ has no companionship with Belial; light never enters into partnership with darkness. “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.”

Balaam is as one of us when we regard him as not clearly perceiving the motive by which he is actually impelled. Our motives are not always clear to our own minds; or we can so trifle with the motive as to vary its expression and modify its claim and suppress its inspiration. We lose sight of the motive in the operation of secondary causes, and these secondary causes we endeavour so to manipulate as to represent the real purpose of life. There are a thousand ways of lying; even falsehood may be turned into a fine art. Balaam did not perhaps fully know his own mind in this matter; and sometimes we have to be revealed to ourselves by others; and the apostolic pen was inspired to write the real motive which urged Balaam forward in his remarkable career. In one suggestive sentence we have the explanation. Balaam is described in the New Testament as a man who “loved the wages of unrighteousness.” He did not know it. It does not become us to charge him with this perfidy in any broad and vulgar sense. Balaam was not a bad man through and through; he was marked by many noble features;

there comes out again and again in his whole speech a distinct and valiant courage ;—but he “loved the wages of unrighteousness.” He did not altogether long for them, yet he did not resist the bribe ; he wanted to be good, but he heard the chink of Balak’s gold ; he loved preaching, he was a born preacher—but a spark, and his soul flamed into poetry and noble rhetoric—but he heard of promotion and honour and dignity, and what amounted almost to the kingship of Moab : for Balak said,—All that thou biddest me do, I will do. It was a fierce temptation ; it was a terrific agony. To stand beside a king, to move the springs of the royal mind, to dictate imperial policies, to curse invaders and repel encroachments, to have gold as the dust of the ground and honours like showers of rain, and to stand there firm, impeccable, resistant to every appeal—to be in a far off country without a friend, and yet to be as good as we might now be in our own blessed homes—who could expect it ? When we condemn Balaam, we condemn human nature ; when we praise any feature in his character, we praise the grace that wrought that mystery in his soul.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thy Church thou hast redeemed with blood. Thou wilt keep thy Church in eternal security. The foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal,—The Lord knoweth them that are his. We can hide nothing from thee. The smallest of thy children is still thine. They shall be mine in that day when I number up my jewels, saith the Lord. Thou dost not lose any jewel. God cannot lose anything. Hold thou us up, and we shall be safe. Show us that we may lose ourselves: that if we are sons of perdition we are sons of waste, and even Christ's wounded hand cannot save us from ruin. Establish us in the confidence of thy Fatherhood; and may we not live in it as in a doctrine only, but exhibit it in daily trust, in noble spiritual sacrifice, in continual and beneficent industry. Thus shall the Lord's seal be confirmed by our loyalty, and no man shall curse what God the Lord hath blessed. We stand in thy blessing: thy benediction is our heaven, thy smile our perpetual light. This is our joy; and this holy confidence brings amongst us the shout of a king, so that all thy princes are greater than Agag, and the smallest of thy children is more than the kings of the earth. Fill us with holy delight; drive away all temptation and evil importunity, and extinguish every baleful fire; let our bodies be the temples of the Holy Ghost; may our souls be inspired, and our whole hearts know the mystery and the joy of sacrifice. Thou regardest us according to our need. Thou art twice Father to some. Thou art the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to us who are in Christ thou art Father; but to those who have no father on earth and are yet children redeemed thou art Father upon Father: thy Fatherliness rises into the passion and mystery of love. This is our confidence and our delight and our sure hope. The Lord regard those who are in peculiar circumstances of loneliness, or pain, or fear, or weakness; spread the table of poverty, and make the one loaf into many; draw water for those who are thirsty, and may it be unto them as the wine of heaven; make the bed of affliction, soften the pillow of pain; send into the hearts of the people a spirit of love and generosity and beneficence; and may we know that life is only noble as it gives, and lives in others, and delights in spreading sunshine and joy. Let the Book of the Lord be a flame of fire in the night-time and a pillar of cloud in the day season; in our right hand may there be a rod, in our left hand a staff. Thy rod and thy staff shall comfort us, and the valley of the shadow of death shall have in it no evil or darkness because of the Lord's presence. Help us to sing again loudly, sweetly, lovingly; and whilst we tarry in God's house, may we feel the nearness of the Lord's hand. Amen.

Numbers xxii.-xxiv.

BALAAM'S VISION OF THE CHURCH.

LET Israel, as gathered within sight of Moab, be regarded as representing the Church of the living God : let Balak, king of Moab, be regarded as representing all the forces which encounter the Church of the living God with suspicion or hostility : let Balaam be regarded as the prophet of the Lord standing between the Church and the kingdoms of heathenism, and declaring the divine purpose, and dwelling in sacred and rapturous eloquence upon the condition, the forces, and the destiny, of the Church of Christ. Such are the conditions which are now before us :—Israel the Church, Balak heathenism and every manner of hostility, Balaam the voice of Heaven, the prophet of God. Such being the picture, what are the doctrines which underlie it and breathe through it and appeal to our confidence and imagination ?

First of all, the Church is represented as being “blessed.” We read,—“And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them ; thou shalt not curse the people : for they are blessed” (xxii. 12). To repeat that word is best to explain it. Some words refuse to pass into other terms, for they are themselves their best expositors ;—*blessed* is one of those words. We are not taught that Israel was in a state of momentary enjoyment—passing through some transient experience of gladness ; but Israel is represented as sealed with a divine benediction : Israel is blessed—not merely to be blessed, or reserved for blessing ; but through eternity is blessed—set in sureness in the divine covenant, created and made a people by the divine knowledge and purpose and love. Here is no small contention as between momentary complacency and momentary hostility : we are in the eternal region, we are standing amid the august certainties of divine purpose, recognition and determination. The Church is, therefore, blessed—sealed, gathered around the Lord, set in his sight,—an inheritance, a possession, a sanctuary. That the Church does not rise to the glory of its election according to the divine purpose has no bearing whatever upon the argument. All things are in process ; nothing is yet finished. Is it a temple ?—the walls are being

put up. Is it a tree?—the tree is yet in process of growing, and we know nothing yet of its magnitude or its fruitfulness. Is it a character?—time is required, and we must read destiny—not in immediate appearances, but in the divine decree and in the inspired revelation. A man is not in reality what he appears to be at any given moment: man is as to possibility what he is in the divine thought. Until we have seen that thought in clearest realisation, it little becomes us to sneer at the meanest specimen of human nature, or to mock the handiwork of God. Let this stand: that there is a family, a Church, an institution—describe it by any name—which is “blessed”;—in other words, there is a spot on the earth on which the divine complacency rests like a Sabbath-light; we may well consider our relation to that place; it would not be unbecoming even the dignity of reason to ask what its own relation is to that sacred and ever-blessed position.

This being the case, the negative seems to become the positive when we read that the Church of the living God is beyond the power of human cursing. Said Balaam,—“How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed?” That is a great principle. Balaam might use the words of cursing, but there would be no anathema in his impotent speech. The curse of man cannot get within the sanctuary of God. The Church is hidden within the pavilion of the Most High: the Church is beyond “the strife of tongues”: the curses are all outside noises—like the wings of night-birds beating against the eternal granite. “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper”;—the weapon shall be formed, the weapon shall be lifted up, the weapon shall apparently come down; but it shall miss thee, and cut nothing but the vacant air. Unless we have some such confidence as this, we shall be the sport of every rumour, exposed to every wild alarm, without peace: in the whole week there will be no Sabbath day, after the day’s tumult there will be no time of repose: the house will be open to the encroachment of every evil. We must, therefore, stand in great principles, and take refuge in the sanctuary of divine and revealed appointments. You cannot injure the really good man: you may throw many stones at him, but you will never strike him; much speech may be levelled against him, but the speech will be without point. A

good man is the Lord's jewel; a soul in harmony with the Christian purpose is a soul hidden in the security of God's almightiness. That we do not realise this is to our shame and not to the discredit of the inspired testimony. When a Christian is in alarm, he is doing more injury to the Christian cause than can be done by any outside assailants; when the good man interrupts his prayer by some expression of fear or doubt, he is doing more to invalidate every argument for the sufficiency of prayer than can be done by the most penetrating intellectual criticism or by the most audacious unbelief. Our religion is nothing if it does not make us feel our security and turn that security into a temple of living and daily praise. It still lies, therefore, with the believer to injure his cause, to bring discredit upon God's temple, and to expose the Eternal Father to human suspicion. Let us beware of this, lest the enemies of God should be found in his own household.

Is there not something in the condition of the Church that might excite—shall we call it?—the envy—the religious envy of the world? Read chapter xxiii. 10:—"Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?" The Church grows upon the attentive vision; at first it does not seem to be what it really is, but as the prophet looks the little one becomes a thousand and the small nation becomes a great empire, and those who were of little account from a physical point of view rise into immeasurable proportions of force and possibilities of service. The Church is—let us repeat—what God sees it to be: God sees it to be the power of the world, the light to illuminate it, the salt to preserve it, the city to be as a beacon in relation to it. The Lord has said that the Church shall overcome all opposition. The time in which it is about to do this is, by our reckoning, very long—so long, that our poor patience almost expires and our faith sharpens itself into an almost doubtful inquiry, saying,—O Lord! how long?—the wicked are robust, evil-minded men are many in number, and virtue seems to be cast out upon the street and to be exposed to a very precarious fortune—O Lord! how long? It is a natural question, full of reasonableness from a merely human point of view, and it never can be suppressed except by that increase of faith which makes our life superior to the death-principle that is in us—that

fills us with a sense of already-realised immortality. Balaam saw Israel to be an innumerable host. Numbers played a great part in the imagination of the Eastern mind, and the Lord, touching the imagination of Balak along the only accessible lines, makes Balaam speak about the great host. Why, the dust of it could not be counted; no reckoning could sum up the fourth part of Israel; and as the numbers increased and came down in threatening countless multitudes upon the imagination of Balak, he was staggered by the vision of the majesty of Israel. That is the view we must take of the case. Let God number his Church. He teaches us by all these allusions that numbering is impossible on our part. We do but vex ourselves by taking the statistics of the Church: only God can take them, and he so represents them as to dazzle the imagination—to throw our power of reckoning into absolute despair. From the beginning, he spoke thus about numbers: he would never entrust us with the exact numerical secret; when he told one man how many children he should have, he said,—More than the stars, more than the sands upon the sea-shore,—innumerable. God's arithmetic is not a pronounceable quantity; it touches the imagination and excites the wonder, until imagination and wonder consent in their intellectual impotence to fall down like white-robed worshippers and say,—Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, thou Father in heaven!

According to Balaam, the Church is named in an unchangeable decree: "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (xxiii. 19). This is not a God that can be changed by temptation or whose decrees can be varied by circumstances. We do not surprise him by our sin. He does not alter the will because the younger son has gone away contrary to his expectation: when he made the will he foresaw the apostasy. There is nothing omitted from the divine reckoning. He saw the sin before he called me his child; he knew every time the arm of rebellion would be lifted and every time the voice of unbelief would challenge the integrity of his promises. The will overrides all these things: the Testator foresaw them, and

the covenant was made in view of them. Herein is comfort, but not licence; herein is a great security, but no permission to tempt the living God. The view which the divine eye took of the whole situation was a complete view; reckoning up all sides, all forces, all possibilities and issues, the decree went forth, that out of this human nature, come whence it may—straight from God's hands, in one form or the other, it must have come—this human nature shall be the temple of the living God, and out of those human eyes shall gleam the fire of divinity. If we believed anything short of this, our testimony would not be worth delivering—at best, it would be but a happy conjecture, or a fanciful possibility, wanting in lines of solidity, and in characteristics of certainty—wanting in the absoluteness which alone can give a steadiness of position to the human will and the destiny of the human career. Were all these covenants, arrangements and promises open to mere criticism of a verbal kind, we should have no inheritance—we should be but beggars to the last, living upon appearances and exhausting the unsubstantial fortune of illusory hopes; but our Christian position is,—God is unchangeable, the covenant is unalterable, the good man is the accepted of God, and the almightiness of God is pledged to see the good man through river, sea, wilderness, and the battle, being God's, can only end in one way.

According to Balaam's vision of the Church, Israel is guiltless and royal. This is proved by chapter xxiii. 21:—"He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them."

Herein is the mystery of love. Already we begin to see the meaning of the marvellous expression—"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel"—whilst, from the human point of view, he has never seen anything else. The whole history up to this point has been on the part of Israel or Jacob a disclosure of meanness, selfishness, complaining, perfidy, and perverseness. Both the statements are perfectly true. They may not be open to the cheap reconciliation of mere verbal adjustment, but they are strictly in harmony with the

great central line which unites and consolidates the universe. God does not judge in great and final senses by the detailed slips, losses, mistakes, misadventures, follies, and sins of his people ;—what a life would be God's eternity could it be vexed by these details ! We are lacking in the divine charity which sees the "man" within the "sinner"—which sees behind the iniquity the divine seed. We are lacking in the divine benevolence which distinguishes between the action of the hand—which sometimes does not express the motion of the will—and the inward and set purpose of the sanctified soul. We count ourselves clever if we can trip one another up in discrepancies of speech, in small or great shortcomings,—if we can but record a heavy score against some brother, as to a lapse here and a mistake there, and some evil deed yonder. God does not measure the man or Church according to that standard and method : he sees the purpose, he reads the soul, and he sees that nowhere is there a redder blush of shame for anything evil which the hand has done than in the soul of the man who has been convicted as the trespasser. So there are two views to be taken of the Church—the small view, the magisterial criticism, the estimate which is formed by the ingenuity that is most successful in fault-finding ; or the view which is taken by God's purpose, by divine charity, by eternal election and decree. God's purpose is to have the uttermost parts of the earth for an inheritance and a possession ; and already the earth may be called his :—"The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof"—not looked at here and now and within given lines—so looked at it is the devil's earth, it is ripped and seamed by ten thousand times ten thousand graves ;—little children's bones are rotting in it, bad men are building their thrones and palaces upon it. The devil's hunting-ground is this earth within a narrow or limited point of view ; but in the divine purpose, in the great outcome of things, this earth is verdant as the upper paradise, pure as spotless snow,—a sanctuary of the Lord ; all lands and languages, all seas, all thrones, all powers, are baptized in the Triune Name, and the whole earth is a worthy annexe of God's own heaven. Take any other view, and you become at once unsettled, unsteady, depleted of all enrichment arising from confidence and hope and promise. This is the true view, for it is the view given in the Scriptures of God.

Balaam recognises the operation of a miracle in all this. He describes Israel as a supreme miracle of God. He says,—“... according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!” (xxiii. 23). Thus the Church becomes the uppermost miracle. From the first it did not seem such workmanship was possible: the material was rough, the conditions were impracticable,—everything seemed to be as different as possible from the grace and purpose of Heaven; but years passed on, and the generations and the ages, and still the mighty Worker continued with patient love to carry forward his purpose, and already chaos seems to be taking shape, already some notes harmonious are heard through all the harsh discord, already there is the outlining of a horizon radiant with the silver of rising day, already God seems to be subduing, overruling, controlling, and establishing things; and looking further on the prophet says,—“According to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!”—how wondrous the transformation; how sublime the moral majesty; how gracious the complete deliverance! That, again, is our standing ground. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.” It is not within our little ability to establish the divine kingdom upon the earth; but God will bring in an everlasting kingdom: he “will overturn, overturn, overturn, . . . until he come whose right it is.” So we wait on in patience—patience often sorely troubled, patience that is vexed by many a question from the hostile side: men say,—“Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”—not seeing the invisible Hand, not having that sharp vision which perceives the rectification of lines so fibrous and so delicate, not knowing that God’s transformation is being worked from the interior; that it is not a case of external painting but a case of spiritual regeneration, and according to the majesty of the subject within whose life this mystery is to be accomplished is the time which even God requires for the outworking and consummation of his miracle.

Then Balaam paints a picture—such a picture as would appeal to the Eastern imagination. He compares Jacob and Israel to the most beautiful of all spectacles; he says,—“How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys

are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted" (xxiv. 5-7). Why speak so much about streams and rivers and waters?—because nothing appealed so vividly to the Oriental imagination. To have plenty of water was to be rich in the days of Balaam and in the country of Balak. So Balaam, taught by the Lord to speak the music of truth and of heaven, speaks of Jacob and Israel as being "valleys" where the water rolled, "as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes . . . and as cedar trees beside the waters." In other parts of the Old Testament those same cedar trees are spoken of with the rapture of poetry:—they put out their dark roots towards the river, they suck up the streams, and they report the success of the root in the far-spreading branches which seem to have lifted themselves up to the very clouds of heaven. Every country has its own standards of success, its own signs of prosperity, its own symbols which most vividly appeal to the imagination of the inhabitants; and water constituted the great object of admiration and of thankfulness in the Eastern mind. And then the King that was coming was to be "higher than Agag" (ver. 7). The word "Agag" means "high"; the word "Agag" is the name of the Amalekite kings, as "Pharaoh" was the name of the kings of Egypt, and "Abimelech" the name of the kings of the Philistines; so Agag is not any one personal king but the *you* or *I* of the Amalekite nation; and when Balak and his hosts looked upon their mighty Agag, Balaam said,—He is a child compared with the coming King—a mere infant of days compared with the crowned One of Jacob; when He comes whose right it is to reign, all other kings and princes will acknowledge his right, and fall down before him, and pay their crowns as tribute to his majesty.

This, then, is the position of the Church of Christ. We believe a great future is in store for the Church. Were we to look at the Church within given lines, we should say,—Great is its poverty, very questionable its intellectual stand-point; a very troubled community is the Church—vexing itself by divers

theologies and conceptions and theories and speculations. But we must not look at the question in that way. Call for the Lord's prophet: let "the man whose eyes are open" be called to stand on the hills of Moab, and his speech will be:—

"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more."

"Kings shall fall down before him,
And gold and incense bring;
All nations shall adore him,
His praise all people sing":—

they shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, to increase the hosts of the divine army. He shall have the heathen for an inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession; he shall rule the enemy with a rod of iron. This shall be the end. He shall reign till all enemies are put under his feet; and the whole universe, complete in its intermediate education, shall shout in thunder-psalm: HALLELUJAH! HALLELUJAH! the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! It is in that forecast we work; left to ourselves, we should give up the battle to-day, saying,—The enemy is too many for us; but a Voice says,—The battle is not yours, but God's; then we reply,—They that are for us are more than them that be against us.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, the way to thee is a broad way. We may come boldly to a throne of grace. The access which thy Son has wrought out for us is a great access. We will approach thee by the way which he has marked out. So we advance without fear, and can even venture to lift up our eyes unto heaven. At the very moment when we smite upon our breast, we have confidence in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. We think we could now bear to look upon the shaded glory of the Lord of hosts. We have been with Jesus, and have learned of him. At first we were afraid of the great fire, saying, Behold, it burns like an oven, and is hot as the wrath of justice. But now we know thee. God is love. Thou dost wait to be gracious, thou dost live for thy creation. We feel as if thou thyself wert praying for us in the very act of answering our petition. Thou dost make our prayer for us ; it is the inditing of thy Holy Spirit in the heart. It is a speech we never invented, but which we receive and adopt as the good gift of God, relieving our heart as it does of the pressure of its pain and expressing happily all the desire of its necessity. Thou dost teach us how to pray. Thou wouldest have us praying always and never faint. Help us, then, to pray without ceasing, as we live without ceasing. We live whilst we sleep, we live in our unconsciousness ; the life still keeps beating on ready for the morning of expectation and service and sacrifice. So may we pray in our very unconsciousness—yea, when we do not know we are praying in form and in set petition. May our life so acquire the sacred habit of the upward look and the heavenly expectation that without a word we may mightily cry unto the Father-Heart. We bless thee that we have experience of this kind. We are ashamed of our words : they are wings that cannot fly far ; our souls must of themselves, in all the speechlessness of enraptured love, seek thee, find thee, and hold long and sweet communion with thee. We would live and move and have our being in God. This prayer thou dost never deny. Thou dost keep wealth from us, and prosperity, and renown, and riches, and honour, and ease ; these things thou dost drive away with a sharp wind ; but never didst thou say No to the soul that longed to be purer, to the heart that desired to be cleansed. May we find great answers to our petitions. They are addressed to thee in the appointed way, they are sealed with the name of Christ ; every syllable is sprinkled with the blood of reconciliation ; we say nothing out of our own name, or because of our own invention ; we speak the Lord's prayer in the Lord's name, and we are sure of the Lord's answer. We cannot tell thee what thou dost not know ; yet thou dost love to hear us talk ; thou delightest in the speech of man ; there is something in it which we ourselves cannot hear ; thou art carried back to thine own eternity. Even in our poor attempts

to speak thou hearest a music which no other ear can detect in the utterances of man. What is that music? Is it a cry of pain? Is it the note of a voice of one who is lost in a wild night and cannot tell the east from the west, or where the sweet home lies warm with hospitable welcomes? Thou knowest there is divinity in it—a strange pulsing of the eternal music. When we speak thus to thee, in the name of Jesus, our music becomes a mighty prayer, and thine answer encompasses the heavens like a cloud too rich with blessing for the very heavens to contain. Lead us on. We do not know where the grave is, nor do we care. It may be one foot off, or many a mile away, hidden among the years that are yet to be numbered by tens and twenties. Whether it is already dug, or is not to be dug for many a day, what care we? Being in Christ we cannot die; rooted in the Life Eternal, death can but touch the outer frame. We ourselves are already in heaven. Amen.

Numbers xxvi.

DIVINE ENUMERATION.

IN the second verse we read,—“Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel.” We have had that instruction before. God is a God of numbers. He numbereth the stars; and as for those who hold sweet counsel together respecting him and his kingdom, he says,—“They shall be mine in that day when I make up my jewels.” “The very hairs of your head are all numbered”—not counted only, but singled out as if each particular hair bore its own number. Whatever will assist the imagination in the direction of recognising the exquisiteness and minuteness of the divine care may be employed in this service of exposition. As we said when the census was first taken, God could have numbered the people himself, but instead of undertaking the work himself he appointed others to carry out his purpose. God is always numbering. He may number to find out who are present, but in numbering to find out who are present he soon comes to know who are absent. He knows the total number, but it is not enough for him to know the totality: he must know whether David’s place is empty, whether the younger son has gone from the father’s house, whether one piece of silver out of ten has been lost, whether one sheep out of a hundred has gone astray. We are all of consequence to the Father, because he does not look upon us through the glory of his majesty but through the solicitude of his fatherhood and his love. Take heed that ye despise not one of these

little ones; it were better for a man that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea, than that he should offend—wound the heart of—one of these little ones. So, everywhere we find God concerning himself with individuals, with single families, with solitary lives,—stooping in marvellous condescension, sweeping the house diligently until he find the one piece that was lost. We need this kind of thought in human life: living would be weary work without it. If we do not need the thought every day in the week, we need it twice over some days, and so we make up the average of necessity. The earth needs the sky. Even in the larger world of thought, history, science, it is not enough to have mere facts, measurable as to their magnitude and numerable as to their succession. Even literature has its poetry, its fiction,—its noble imagination. There is a great philosophy in all this. The human heart will not be caged within small bars; if it must be caged, it will be bounded only by the infinity of God. So the hardest mind has its religion; it calls that religion “poetry,” “imagination,” “fiction”; but it has its larger world. This same thought runs through all time, all life. Even the day has its night of dreams. So, we need the comforting thought that God looks after us, numbers us, and makes a register in which the meanest name is written down with palpable and infinite care.

This chapter reads very much like the other chapter in which the census was first taken. The same great and noble names recur. Who could distinguish between the first chapter of Numbers and the twenty-sixth if they were read in immediate succession? Who would not declare that the chapters are identical? Yet they are not the same. The vision that mistakes them as being identical is a clouded eye; the ear that thinks it hears the same music in the enumeration of the names is an ear not trained to the discrimination of the finer sound: it is a rough ear—a mere highway of sound, not critical, watching, balancing and understanding the minuter tones and the tones that are subdued and so finely-coloured as to seem to be without flush of light. So roughly do we read the Bible, that we imagine that every chapter is like every other chapter. We do not number after God's critical method, but

after some rude and coarse way of our own, by which we miss all finest lines, all tenderest suggestion of life and mystic presence. But are there not many names just the same? Yes, the generic names are the same. Still we read, even in the twenty-sixth chapter of Numbers, of Reuben and Simeon, of Judah and Issachar, of Zebulun and Joseph, of Manasseh and Ephraim, of Benjamin and Dan, and Asher and Naphtali. The historic names are the same, but what a going-down in the detail! We must enter into this thought and follow its applications if we would be wise in history: generic names are permanent, but the detail of life is a panorama continually changing. It is so always and everywhere. The world has its great generic and permanent names, and it is not enough to know these and to recite them with thoughtless fluency. Who could not take the statistics of the world in general names? Then we should have the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, the faithful and the faithless, the good and the bad. That has been the record of life from the beginning; and yet that is too broadly-lined to be of any real service to us in the estimate of human prayers and human moral quality. What about the detailed numbers, the individual men, the particular households, the children in the crowd? It was in these under-lines that the great changes took place. The bold, leading names remained the same, but they stood up like monumental stones over graves in which thousands of men had been buried. So with regard to our own actions: we speak of them too frequently with generic vagueness: we are wanting in the persistent criticism that will never allow two threads of life to be intertangled, that must have them separated and specifically examined. God will have no roughness of judgment, no bold vagueness, no mere striking of averages; but heart-searching, weighing—not the action: any manufactured scales might weigh a deed. He will have the motive weighed, the invisible force, the subtle, ghostly movement that stirs the soul; not to be found out by human wisdom, but to be seized, detected, examined, estimated, and determined by the living Spirit of the living God. That is how a man's actions, motives, and whole inner life must be weighed and estimated.

The sin of the individual does not destroy the election of the race. Israel is still here, but almost countless thousands of

Israelites have sinned and gone to their doom. With all this individual criticism and specific numbering, do not imagine that it lies within the power of any man to stop the purpose or arrest the kingdom of God. There is a consolatory view of all human tumult and change, as well as a view that tries the faith and exhausts the patience of the saint. Balaam could not curse Israel, but Israel cursed himself. That is always so. No man outside of us can do us any permanent harm, though his tongue be set on fire of hell and he have the wit of Beelzebub in the invention of evil and malignant accusations. Balaam brought Israel to curse himself. What highest prophet cannot do externally the meanest tempter may do internally and spiritually. Balaam brought Israel into entanglement with the Midianitish women, and in one day four-and-twenty thousand Israelites fell—suicides!—not blasted by an external curse of priest or prophet or magical conjurer, but lapsed in heart, devoted to things forbidden,—self-damned. What wonder if God would have the people renumbered—not only that he might take some account of life but make a solemn registry of death? It is well to number the dead, to tell of what diseases they die, and to have our attention directed to the silent cemetery as well as to the tumultuous city. How stands the kingdom then? The kingdom still stands. Did we suppose that four-and-twenty thousand Israelites all caught in sin and all smitten with a common plague would arrest the kingdom of God? What a mischievous imagination! What a shallow and foolish sophism! The kingdom is decreed, the covenant is made, and none can hinder. We bewilder ourselves by looking at individual sinners, or by fixing our wondering attention upon individual saints or believers, and saying,—What progress can the kingdom of heaven make when prominent Christians are so faulty in character or in spirit? We then talk as foolish people talk. The kingdom of heaven is an everlasting kingdom: it moves on through city and cemetery, up steep hills and down dark valleys, and nothing can arrest its progress. It is not in the power of the individual—let us say again—to stop the upbuilding of the theocracy. We lament that a man here or there should have done wrong,—why, if four-and-twenty thousand men were all to do wrong to-day and die, the kingdom is not touched: the four corners of it stand to the wind

and defy the tempest. The counsels of eternity are not exposed to the irregularities of time. God has decreed that man shall bear his image and likeness and shall be beautiful with ineffable comeliness, and Philistine, or Canaanite, or Moabite, cannot keep back the purpose from ultimate fulfilment. We live in a sanctuary ; we are bound to an infinite thought. It is pitiful for any Christian man to talk about individual instances of lapse or faithlessness, as though they touched the infinite calm of the mind of God and the infinite integrity of the covenant of Heaven. It is so in all other departments of life—why not so on the largest and noblest scale ? The nation may be an honest nation, though a thousand felons may be under lock and key at the very moment when the declaration of the national honesty is made ; the nation may be declared to be a healthy country, though ten thousand men be burning with fever at the very moment the declaration of health is made. So the Church of the living Christ, redeemed at an infinite cost, sealed by an infinite love, is still the Lamb's Bride, destined for the heavenly city, though in many instances there may be defalcation, apostasy,—yea, very treason against truth and good. Live in the larger thought ; do not allow the mind to be troubled and distressed by individual instances. The kingdom is one, and, like the seamless robe, must be taken in its unity.

Individuals must not trust to ancestral piety. Individual Israelites might have quoted the piety of many who had gone before ; but that piety goes for nothing when the individual will is in rebellion against God. No man has any overplus of piety. No man may bequeath his piety to his posterity. A man cannot bequeath his learning,—how can he bequeath his holiness ? It does not lie within a testator's power to leave wisdom to any child of his ; how, then, can he leave to any child of his character, good standing before the heavens ? Nor must the individual trust to the divine covenant in the time of his evil-doing and in his devotion to the Baal of Midian ; the covenant will not save him ; he cannot break the covenant, for the covenant relates to larger lines, to further issues ; and though he be left like a dead dog in the wilderness, the army will go on and the Church will be admitted into heaven. A wondrous conception is this thought that human detail does not interfere with divine purpose ; and a

marvellous thing it is to fix the mind upon the intention of God to create in the long run a humanity that cannot die. When theology, in its boldest propositions, comes to be restated in the light of the completest research and experience, the mind will be projected to points of issue, and will be enabled to take in such comprehensive views of divine thought and purpose, as shall reconcile, in their vastness and their harmony, things which at present assume the sharpness and the vexatiousness of contradiction. We will look too near the dust. The artist will not allow us to go too near his canvas ; but we thrust our very faces into the painting of God ;—what wonder if it should appear rough and wanting in the mystery of perspective ? Stand back ; give God time ; let the relations of survey and criticism be wisely adjusted ; and when God's processes are complete then say whether he hath done all things well.

A mournful line is this :—"But among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai"—except Caleb and Joshua (verses 64, 65). But there are always two old men left, blessed be God ! We need not make a mournful line of it wholly. There are always some left who keep up good traditions, who link us to a noble past, who remind us of altars where men prayed with vehement strength and prevailing persuasiveness. The congregation changes year by year, but new men succeed to vacant places ; and yet in every congregation there are old Caleb and Joshua, rich with years and experience ; and we say that if two such old men could join hands, they might stretch back a hundred-and-fifty or two hundred years and touch some good man's hand in the centuries dead and gone. Not a man left,—yet Israel was left, more than six hundred thousand strong. True, the census had decreased by some eighteen hundred since it was taken in Sinai ; but Israel remained. True, many had gone down through living their days in vanity and spending their nights in the service of the evil one ; but Israel, the chosen of God, remained—a mighty host, a great and blessed people. Not a man save two,—but God lives, God remains ; Jesus is the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Preachers die, but the ministry continues ; sermons are ended, but the Christian pulpit stands from age to age ;

congregations change, but the Lord's Gospel has never wanted a hearing people, an attentive host, crying for the word of the Lord. So we have the permanent and the transitory—the eternal God, and the changing host; and yet amid the changing host we have a central quantity: the details change, the great columnar line abides, and none can touch it. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his";—and no false soul can pass the gate and elude the criticism of Omniscience.

NOTE.

Moses laid down the law (Ex. xxx. 12, 13) that whenever the people were numbered, an offering of half a shekel should be made by every man above twenty years of age, by way of atonement or propitiation. A previous law had also ordered that the firstborn of man and of beast should be set apart, as well as the first fruits of agricultural produce; the first to be redeemed, and the rest with one exception offered to God (Ex. xiii. 12, 13; xxii. 29).

Many instances of numbering are recorded in the Old Testament. The first was under the express direction of God (Ex. xxxviii. 26) in the third or fourth month after the Exodus, during the encampment at Sinai, chiefly for the purpose of raising money for the Tabernacle. The numbers then taken amounted to 603,550 men, which may be presumed to express with greater precision the round numbers of 600,000 who are said to have left Egypt at first (Ex. xii. 37).

Again, in the second month of the second year after the Exodus (Num. i. 2, 3). This census was taken for a double purpose: (a) to ascertain the number of fighting men from the age of twenty to fifty. The total number on this occasion, exclusive of the Levites, amounted to 603,550 (Num. ii. 32), Josephus says 603,650; each tribe was numbered, and placed under a special leader, the head of the tribe. (b) To ascertain the amount of the redemption offering due on account of all the firstborn, both of persons and cattle. Accordingly the numbers were taken of all the firstborn male persons of the whole nation above one month old, including all of the tribe of Levi of the same age. The Levites, whose numbers amounted to 22,000, were taken in lieu of the firstborn males of the rest of Israel, whose numbers were 22,273, and for the surplus of 273 a money payment of 1,365 shekels, or five shekels each, was made to Aaron and his sons (Num. iii. 39, 51).

Another numbering took place thirty-eight years afterwards, previous to the entrance into Canaan, when the total number, excepting the Levites, amounted to 601,730 males, showing a decrease of 1,870. All tribes presented an increase except the following:—Reuben, of 2,770; Simeon, 37,100; Gad, 5,150; Ephraim and Naphtali, 8,000 each. The tribe of Levi had increased by 727 (Num. xxvi.). The great diminution which took place in the tribe of Simeon may probably be assigned to the plague consequent on the misconduct of Zimri (Calmet, *on Num.* xxv. 9). On the other hand, the chief instances of increase are found in Manasseh, of 20,500; Benjamin, 10,200; Asher, 11,900; and Issachar, 9,900. None were numbered at this census who had been above twenty years of age at the previous one in the second year, excepting Caleb and Joshua (Num. xxvi. 63, 65).—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, let the words of truth sink into our hearts and abide there like roots planted by thine own hand which shall spring up into beauty and strength in days to come. We know the right way in all things; our hearts by thy grace point it out and say to us in plain words, This is the way: walk in it. Yet there is another voice in our hearts which bids us walk another path which seemeth right, but the end whereof is death. So we are set between these two voices, each of which is strong and clear and full of persuasion; and now we walk the right road, and now the wrong one; now we sing like children going home, and now we bow down the head and cry like prodigals whose sins have blotted out the light. This is our life: it is indeed our own—not some other man's, which we may speak about and feel for, approve or condemn; but it is our own spirit, our very self. We see it, know it, own it, and are lost between conflicting and tremendous emotions. Thou dost know us altogether—the quantities in which we are made, the forces which constitute our energy, all the weak points in our character, all the infirmities of our constitution, all the peculiarities of our circumstances; the very hairs of our head are all numbered. We can, therefore, find rest in the infinity of thy knowledge, and in the infinity of thy compassion. We have no answer; justification we have none. We could plead weakness, temptation, and suddenness of trial; but in all these things we should answer and condemn ourselves without the opening of thy mouth in judgment. Verily, our mercies are more in number than our difficulties; thy Cross is infinitely in excess of our necessity, thou art near to help, if we were but ready to pray. We have all things in God as revealed to us in Christ Jesus his Son, and yet we go hither and thither like men doomed to want, elected to perish under cold, and storm-clouds, and fated to die in darkness for whose gloom there are no words. Thus we belie thee; we falsify thee to ourselves and before men, and we bring the Cross of Christ into disrepute, because having seen it and felt its power, we still talk of our sins as of an unlifted load, we still point to our iniquities as if they had not been dissolved and destroyed by thy forgiveness. Pity our piety; forgive the poverty of our worship, and see in the incertitude of our religious action how pitifully weak we are at the very centre of our being, how wanting in faith, how ungrateful for the promises of God. Still we hover about thy Book as if even yet we might find honey in the flower; still we inquire meekly for the house of God, if haply we may there see an outline of his image and hear some tone of the music of his love. We would hope in these things and because of them—yea, we would multiply them into assurances of thy nearness, goodness, and purpose to save; because we are so near the

altar we feel we cannot die. We have brought our mercies to our memory, that we might carry them up into songs of praise, and express our feeling in loud psalms of reverence and adoration. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost. Thou hast satisfied our hunger; thou hast drawn water for us when the well was deep, and we had nothing to draw with; thou hast made our bed in our affliction; and as for our friends who are not with us in the body, thou hast so quickened our imagination and our sympathy, that they are with us in soul, and we are in fellowship with them at the throne of grace. Thou hast given us views of life which have abolished death: so now we triumph in solitude and in pain; we know that we are separated by the thinnest of clouds, the flimsiest of veils, from that which is now invisible and eternal. Here we stand; in the strength of this faith we struggle; in the inspiration of this confidence we move onward from day to day, writing what we can of good upon the record whilst the sun lasts, and confident that it is good in Christ Jesus thy Son to fall into the hands of the living God who knows us better than we can know ourselves, whose mercy exceeds our sin and whose great heaven makes our earth look so small. Amen.

Numbers xxvi. 11.

“Notwithstanding, the children of Korah died not.”

THE PROGENY OF EVIL.

WE read that “the sons of Eliab” were “Nemuel, and Dathan, and Abiram. This is that Dathan and Abiram, which were famous in the congregation, who strove against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they strove against the Lord: and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, what time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men: and they became a sign. Notwithstanding, the children of Korah died not.” This statement is pregnant with conflicting inferences and suggestions about some of which at least we can be definitely and instructively certain. I wished in reading the verse to be able to find in it an expression of mercy, but in this quest I had rather to force my desires than to follow the lead of my understanding. I wanted the “notwithstanding” to be a gracious word indicative of a sparing and discriminating mercy on the part of the Destroyer. Then the text might have run in some such melody as this: The father was a bad man, but the children were spared; notwithstanding the judgment that righteously fell upon him, God said,—The children need not

fall in their parent's apostasy : they shall be kept from harm and danger ; they shall be succoured, and defended, and cherished, and all the grace of Heaven shall be their security ; the father was, indeed, a bad man : he outraged the sanctity of all the solemn relationships which he sustained : the earth opened and swallowed him and his company and fraternity ; but his children love me, serve me, go in the right roads, and they are this day spared because of the pureness and the love of their heart and life. I wanted to rest there, and pass on into the next verse. It would have been a happy adieu to the children of Korah, it would have satisfied the poetry of the occasion ; but the reason of it—the steady, stern, sober lesson of it—so to say, laid its grip upon me and said,—You have not got the meaning of that verse yet : read it again ; be faithful to what you yourself know of life, and experience, and judgment, and fail not to beat out the solemn music from this judicial record. We cannot read things as we would like to read them. There is not a man in the world who likes to stoop over the cradle and think of original sin. It is repugnant in every aspect and in every inference, and seems to be contradicted by the whole appearance of the occasion, and to be one huge black lie, not against the child only, but against God. The question is,—How shall we read life ? Shall we read it with intent to find out its meaning, or with the hope of smoothing down its rough sentences, escaping its penalties, and hiding ourselves from its judgments ? We had better have a little rough reading at the beginning. Nothing stands but real truth, that which is perfectly transparent in its moral beauty ; and we had, therefore, better bring ourselves to critical and definite reading. Better have the roughness at first than at last ; better be wise in the morning and have the whole day to work in, than begin as fools who, having wasted the light, fall to praying in the darkness.

“Notwithstanding, the children of Korah died not.” May we not read it,—that though the sire dies the progeny lives ? There is a continuity of evil in the world. We only cut off the tops of iniquities : their deep roots we do not get at ; we pass the machine over the sward, and cut off the green tops of things that are offensive to us ; but the juicy root is struck many

inches down into the earth, and our backs will hardly be turned, and the click of the iron have ceased, before those roots are asserting themselves in new and obvious growths. Iniquity is not to be shaved off the earth—ironed and mowed away like an obnoxious weed,—it must be uprooted, torn right up by every thinnest, frailest fibre of its bad self, and then, having been torn out, left for the fire of the sun to deal with—the fire of mid-day is against it and will consume it. And thus only can growths of evil be eradicated and destroyed. Is Cain dead? Not he! Is not Cain a historical character? Not he!—in any sense that excludes his being a member of a Christian congregation, and, it may be, a tenant of our own hearts. There is some danger in making little children cry over the story of Cain and Abel. We put a great block of time between them and the murder of the sweet Abel, son of Adam and Eve: we never give them the impression that this happened this morning, and that Cain's strong arm is lifted up at this moment and is about to descend in murderous stroke upon weakness and innocence. There is no reason to deny the historical antiquity of the literal event; but we shall lose the meaning of it, and all the wholesomeness of its moral instruction, if we do not tell the child to ask whether he himself is Cain or Abel—the one of them he must be. Only in this way can the Bible keep pace with the ages and look in upon every modern window as the day's dawning light. Is Achan the thief dead, as well as Cain the murderer? Long ago he stole the wedge of gold and the Babylonish garment—yet he stole them this morning—he is stealing them now! A poor thing to say that Achan lived three thousand or four thousand years ago! He is now with leering eye looking round to observe who is watching him; he has got the wedge of gold secreted, and he is now folding the Babylonish garment quietly, noiselessly; he will be off presently, he will hide them whilst other eyes are shut in prayer! How pleasant to talk of him as “he”! What a relief to speak of him as an outside person,—another person! What a cruel criticism that turns the sword point right round towards our own heart, saying,—Your name is Achan! Do not run away because the merely literal incidents do not fit the occasion. The Bible is within the Bible; the meaning is within the meaning. Search into spiritual intent and purpose, and let the man who thinks he is not an

Achan stand up in God's house if he dare. It is understood that he may bluffly deny the charge in conversation, that he may add lies to his knavery in protesting his respectability; but the rudeness of his self-defence is only an additional proof of his spiritual culpability. Is Judas the traitor dead, as well as Cain the murderer and Achan the thief? No: Korah is dead, Cain is dead, Achan is dead, Judas is dead—notwithstanding, the children of these men died not. I have heard an English audience, made up presumably of Christian men, laugh quite audibly when told that in heathen countries it is possible to tempt an idolater to sell his little god; I have heard a Christian assembly laugh when told that some heathen priests have even sold rosaries and sacred things out of the temple courts, but especially laugh when told that some poor idolater has sold his idol for silver or gold. Do Christians know what they are doing when they laugh at such infirmity? Is there no selling of gods in this country? Is there no selling of the Son of God for any number of pieces of silver—even less than thirty—that he will bring? O lying Christian, laughter at poor heathen dupes and at heathen worshippers of vain idols! ours may be a deadlier crime. The man who sells his principles, who keeps quiet in critical times, lest he should bring himself into difficulty or subject his business to loss—it shall be more tolerable for the heathen man in the day of judgment than for that Christian traitor! Every day we are selling Christ, every day we are crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting him to an open shame; and yet at a missionary meeting how some men gather themselves together and chuckle with pious hypocrisy over the poor deluded idolater who parted with his stone god for gold! Men do not think of these things. When you smothered your convictions you sold your God. When, instead of standing square up, and saying, "I will not," that you might save your situation, or your family from starvation, you bartered your God for gold. I cannot sit quietly and hear the heathen laughed at because they take off their little rosaries and sell them for money. They know no better. That very parting with the rosary may be a step in an upward direction when the whole solution is before us. But as for us, to be dumb in the presence of evil, to turn away lest we should bring ourselves into scrapes and difficulties because of standing up for the

oppressed—for us to smooth down the accusation of our Christianity by saying that the church we go to is the most respectable in the neighbourhood—that is a lying which the blood of Christ itself may hardly be able to expunge! There is an unblottable, an unpardonable sin. Is Ananias the liar also gone? No. Literally and historically, Yes—notwithstanding the children of Ananias died not. Lying is a fine art; lying is now a kind of oral legerdemain. What with keeping back and silently or expressively suggesting; by reversing, qualifying, parenthesising, it is now difficult for some men to speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Herein men must judge themselves; every heart must go in upon itself and say,—Am I a truth-speaker and a truth-looker? How seldom it is that Korah thinks he will have any children; that a parent realises that he is going to live again in his child's life! I have heard of men boasting that since a very early period in life they have pursued such and such habits and no harm has come of them. I have been able to see the harm when they have not detected it. In the tremulous tone, in the uncertain hand, in the failing memory falsely attributed to old age, I have seen how the black seed has come to black fruit. But, apart from that, I have traced the issue of certain practices in the constitution and habits of the children. You are not living to yourself and in yourself: you cannot help living in and for other people. Twenty years after this your son will bring you to judgment. Yes, when you have passed away from the earth, he will exhume you, try you, and condemn you at his judgment-bar. You may now be ruining his constitution, disarranging his nervous system: you may be making a hell for him; in all your buoyancy, and hilarity, and worldliness, and thoughtlessness, in all your so-called holiday life, you may be lighting a perdition for your sons and daughters. It is an awful thing to live! You cannot tell where influence begins, how it operates, or how it ends. The boy sitting next you is partly yourself, and he cannot help it. You cannot turn round and say, "You must look after yourself as I had to do." That is a fool's speech. You can never shake off the responsibility of having helped in known and unknown ways and degrees to make that boy what he is. Life is not a surface matter, a loose pebble lying on the road that men can take up and lay down again

without any particular harm being done. When the boy drinks himself into madness, he may be but expressing the influences wrought within him by three generations. When the young man tells a lie, he may be surprised at his own audacity, and feel as if he were rather a tool and a victim than a person and a responsible agent—as if generations of liars were blackening his young lips with their falsehoods. When this youth is restive and will not go to the usual church, do not blame the modern spirit of scepticism and restlessness, but go sharply into the innermost places of your own heart, and see how far you have bolted the church doors against your son, or made a place which he would be ashamed to be seen in.

Then there is a bright side to all this view. I can, now that I have got my rough reading done, turn this “notwithstanding” into a symbol of hope, a light of history; I can make high and inspiring uses of it. I will blot out the word *Korah*, and fill in other names, and then the moral lesson of the text will expand itself into gracious meanings, rise above us like a firmament crowded with innumerable and brilliant lights. In days long ago they killed the martyrs,—notwithstanding, the children of the martyrs died not. There the light begins to come; there I hear music lifting up sweetest voice of testimony and hope. The murderer could never get everybody into the fire; there was always some one little boy that could not be got hold of, and he was made of the old family stuff—a grand old heroic quality that could not lie, that could lay down its poor bodily weakness to the axe, but could never lay down its soul to the murderer. That is the testimony of all history. We are not now dealing with opinions, or imaginations, or sentiments that we should like to be true; but we have before us plain history written in our mother tongue in which this truth is declared with an emphasis that cannot be modified. The tyrant has said, “I will make an end of this mischief.” He has laid his hand upon every man accessible, and has supposed that he has bound all into one bundle of death—notwithstanding there was one child wanting, one family missing, one line of action not involved in the oppressors’ evil success; and no sooner had the martyrs’ fire died out than the surviving martyrs went forward, took up their places, followed in their train and mocked the destroyer.

"We're the sons of sires that baffled
Crowned and mitred tyranny;
They defied the field and scaffold
For their birthright: so will we"—

is but turning into rhyme the sternest of prose, and expressing in melody that which was first written in heroic blood. So, in all the ages, and, thank God, so now, one generation passeth away and another generation cometh, and still Christ's following enlarges; on the whole, he sums up into higher figures year by year. Not that I care for census-religion, not that I would number people for the purpose of ascertaining Christ's position in the world. The kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation; is not a matter of census-reckoning or statistic-returns; it is a matter of spiritual quality, inner manhood, meaning and attitude of the soul; and amid all sin, struggle, doubt, difficulty, darkness, the kingdom moves. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

END OF VOLUME III.

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